

Kent on Sunday

www.kentnews.co.uk April 27, 2014

East Edition No 605

TRANSPORT »

Could Stack be beaten?

Hopes high that scheme will spell the end of regular motorway disruption

GROWTH »

'Garden city' claims are dismissed

But controversy over development continues

WEATHER »

Predicting the summer sun

Amateur forecasters reveal what it will be like...

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Driving the debate; how transport is a conversation starter

THERE is perhaps no topic more likely to ignite a torrent of letters into our mail bag than that of transport.

Whether it is how fast we should – or should not – be allowed to drive on our roads, to the merits, or otherwise, of speed cameras, it can always be relied upon to spark debate.

And this week has certainly done just that.

Operation Stack, for anyone living in the middle or east of the county, is a phrase which means just one thing – traffic chaos.

When lorries park on the M20, the motorway unburies itself by tipping all of its other vehicles onto the surrounding A-roads. And if the conditions dictate, it can create a gridlock which makes everyone's life a misery.

Therefore, any steps to try and alleviate that issue should be welcomed. You can see exactly what is planned inside.



Editor **Chris Britcher**

Alongside it is the latest on the Dartford Crossing changing to free-flowing tolls. This week the Highways Agency made it very clear foreign drivers would not escape its clutches if they simply choose not to pay when the toll booths are removed. Just how effective that threat proves to be, we'll have to wait and see.

And then, of course, there is the recurring shadow of the Thames Estuary airport. A plan which would devastate such huge swathes of the county and which we, as a newspaper, stand opposed to.

Labour's shadow transport minister made the right noises during a visit – but will she actually do what is best and stand alongside everyone campaigning against it and vocally oppose it? We'll believe it when we see it.

When you've read the articles, we'd love to hear your views too. Have a good weekend.



PAGE 14 »



PAGE 19 »



PAGE 24 »



PAGE 51 »



PAGE 70 »

Contents

News

- 9 **More space to park lorries**
Plan could signal end for Operation Stack
- 11 **No country too far away**
Warning for Dartford Crossing fee dodgers
- 12 **Airport fight gathers pace**
Protesters battle to stop estuary scheme
- 14 **Not green or pleasant land**
Hamlet's fears over bid for 6,000 new homes

- 19 **Hurt animal numbers up**
Life at Kent's only wildlife rescue centre
- 22 **Raise cash by going dotty**
Join fundraising fun for children's hospice
- 24 **Predicting the summer**
We put Dave The Weather to the test

The Arts

- 49 **Waxing lyrical**
Ruby's new show is good for your brain

PAGE 49 »



Funtime

- 51 **Special guide to what's on**
All the best places to visit this Bank Holiday
- Sport**
- 70 **For the guys and the gals**
American footballers try out training camp

Plus

- Seven days Page 5
- Feedback Page 58
- Images of Kent Page 59
- Driving Page 63
- Appointments Page 67

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Mr Cooper, Sandwich

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"What was good with the sales representative was the fact he gave us no rubbish 'I'm going to ring my manager'. We will come back for that alone. The fitting team were professional and polite and got on with the job." Mrs Boylett, Sussex

"Fitters were courteous and helpful, answered any questions or queries, kept site as clean and tidy as possible. Many thanks for a good service."
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Fears grow as to whether racecourse will reopen

By Chris Murphy

editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

ANY hopes of top-level horse-racing coming to Kent appear to be years off. Kent on Sunday has learned this week.

The county's only major race track, Folkestone Racecourse, was closed in December 2012 and put on ice.

Owned by Arena Racing, the firm insists the closure is still 'temporary' but has already confirmed there will once again be no racing this year.

The company pulled the plug on the site after plans to build several hundred homes on the site were thrown out.

That could have funded major improvements to the racetrack and its associated facilities.

Instead, Arena put the track into mothballs, leaving race fans fuming.

The situation was highlighted once more when Lingfield Park in Surrey, also owned by Arena, opened on Good Friday for the first time – and pulled in a sell-out crowd of almost 9,000 punters.

Folkestone, meanwhile, stands empty, with only occasional events



FINAL MEETING: But will punters ever get to see top-level horse-racing back at the popular track?

such as The War and Peace Revival show acting as a sign of life.

Now, however, any return of racing any time soon seems unlikely.

Since the housing plans were rejected by the Government's planning inspector, Shepway council has dropped plans for development on the site from its strategic plan. And that leaves the racecourse in limbo.

However, Arena has once again put the site forward for development.

A spokesman for Shepway District Council said: "The council has to prepare a local plan that, when completed, allocates land for a range of uses, including open space and housing development.

"An early stage of preparing the plan is the 'call for sites' process, and the owners of the land have suggested that the site is suitable for development.

"This does not mean that the council will eventually allocate the land for development or that it will

grant planning permission.

"It just means that alongside, many other suggestions, the site is being put forward by a landowner for consideration for future development.

"It would be wrong to assume at this stage that the council will be formally allocating the site for housing in the plan."

Arena Racing did not comment when we contacted the company this week to discuss the course's future.

Revived regeneration scheme for Rochester Riverside back on track

MEDWAY Council chiefs have rubber-stamped a deal with developers to kickstart the Rochester Riverside redevelopment.

The council has approved the sale of a two-acre stretch of waterfront land at Stanley Wharf to the developer Bellway Homes.

Bellway's plans for the site include the development of up to 74 new homes, made up of 46 three- and four-bedroom courtyard-style properties and a block of apartments with the potential for a café and restaurant on the ground floor.

The proposals will be subject to planning permission, which it is hoped will be submitted over the summer.

The leader of Medway Council, Rodney Chambers, said: "The first Rochester Riverside masterplan was adopted in 2003, but since then, and with a recession, much has changed.

"With signs of recovery appearing, now is the right time for us to re-examine the original masterplan, not least because we recognise that

the market demand has changed from apartments to a greater emphasis on family homes.

"These changes in demand have been reflected in the revised masterplan and we will be asking the public for their views as part of the consultation process."

The regeneration of the area will include the development of some 1,500 high-quality residential units, including affordable housing, the provision of open spaces and a riverside walk, new primary school, leisure facilities, office space, shops and restaurants.

The 74-acre Rochester Riverside area will become a new neighbourhood and destination, well connected to the historic heart of Rochester and the new £26 million railway station on Corporation Street, opening in 2015.

A six-week public consultation on the Rochester Riverside Masterplan will run from April 28 to June 6, with an exhibition at Rochester Visitor Centre at the end of May.

Football match ban for thug who incited violence in street

A FOOTBALL thug who tried to goad opposing fans with threats and abuse has been banned from attending any football match for three years.

Michael Andrew O'Shea, 51, of River View in Canterbury, was spotted being aggressive in the High Street area of Gillingham on January 18.

Officers patrolling the area warned him about his behaviour,

but he continued to try to incite violence.

He was subsequently arrested and charged. O'Shea pleaded guilty at Medway Magistrates' Court.

He was issued a three-year football banning order, preventing him from attending any regulated football match. Magistrates also fined him £350 and ordered him to pay £85 costs and £35 victim surcharge.

Deafening Celine Dion track leads to stereo being seized

A NOISY neighbour who played Celine Dion's Titanic chart-topper My Heart Will Go On at deafening levels has had his musical equipment confiscated by council officers.

The culprit, a man in his 40s, subjected residents near his Hone Street home in Strood to loud music during the afternoon and evening. Other favourite tunes were Steppenwolf's Born

To Be Wild and James Brown's classic Get Up (I Feel Like Being A) Sex Machine.

After breaching a noise abatement order on six occasions, Medway Council environmental protection officers obtained a warrant to enter the property and confiscate several thousand pounds worth of equipment including his TV, speakers, CDs and laptop.



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Crowds flock for chance of role in major movie

MOVIE producers behind a new film held open auditions for extras on Saturday.

The movie *Tulip Fever* will be shot in Rochester and Tilbury on dates throughout June and July.

And this weekend those wanting to star alongside the likes of Dane DeHaan, who portrayed the Green Goblin in the *Amazing Spider-Man 2*, and Christoph Waltz, whose credits include *Django Unchained* and

Muppets Most Wanted, got their chance to impress.

The auditions, open to anyone from "17 to 100", took place at MidKent College's Gillingham campus.

Tulip Fever, produced by Ruby Films, which was behind *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *Jane Eyre*, is a 17th-century love story directed by Justin Chadwick, who previously directed *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*.

It is due for release next year.



BUSINESSMAN: Hugo Fenwick

Retail dynasty spawns young High Sheriff

A MEMBER of the Fenwick retail dynasty has become one of the youngest ever to hold the prestigious office of the High Sheriff of Kent.

Father-of-four Hugo Fenwick, 49, who lives in Egerton, near Ashford, took over what is one of the oldest secular offices in the UK following a ceremony at his local church.

Mr Fenwick's great-great-grandfather, John James Fenwick, founded the retail giant back in 1882. Today it has stores across the UK, including outlets in Canterbury and Tunbridge Wells.

Keeping with the family tradition, Mr Fenwick is the company's group trading director, based at its stores in London's New Bond Street.

He succeeds Lord Colgrain.

Today the High Sheriff's role is largely ceremonial and the post is held for just one year.

High Sheriffs are expected to attend to the needs of, and to provide hospitality to, high court judges out on 'circuit'.

Ranking among the region's top dignitaries, they are also required to attend royal visits to their county.

He said: "A key focus of my year will be initiatives that exist for children and young people who are at risk of falling into the criminal justice system. Early intervention is vital."

Schoolgirl, 12, feared she was pregnant after being groomed by 23-year-old

By Chris Britcher

chris.britcher@archant.co.uk

THE perils facing youngsters on social-networking sites were highlighted once again this week when a 23-year-old began a jail sentence after grooming a 12-year-old girl online.

James Newman, of Longfield Avenue in Longfield, near Dartford, befriended the school girl on the music-sharing website BearShare.

When police finally caught up with him, they found him in possession of hundreds of indecent images.

He was sentenced to four and a half years at Maidstone Crown Court this week after admitting possession of indecent images of a child and three counts of sexual activity with a child at a previous hearing.

The court heard that Newman began talking with the young girl between January and May 2013.

She told him she was 12, while he claimed he was 18.

Newman then began contacting the girl through Facebook and the



JAILED: James Newman

pair talked on Skype regularly. The young girl suggested the pair meet in person and it was then that Newman admitted he was 23.

The pair met for the first time shortly after the girl's 13th birthday

at Rochester train station. They went for a drive and kissed on the lips. They then met up every week for the next three weeks.

On the second occasion they stopped at a place Newman bragged as being a place he "used to street-race in".

They engaged in sexual activity, which the girl consented to at first, but she later withdrew her consent. Newman continued.

After meeting again two weeks later, and engaging in more sexual activity, the girl later told Newman she thought she might be pregnant. He did not reply to her messages and stopped contacting her.

The teenager then spoke to a teacher at school. Newman was arrested on November 28 and his computer and phone were seized.

A total of 213 indecent images were found.

Detective Constable Sunita Dale said: "I would like to once again highlight the importance of parents monitoring how young people use the internet."

Eighties stars added to Castle Concerts

EIGHTIES stars Level 42 and Shakatak have been confirmed as the headliners for the first night of this year's Castle Concerts series in Rochester.

The acts will perform in the grounds of Rochester Castle on July 16.

They form part of a series of open-air events at the venue, with the following days seeing performances by Westlife star Shane Filan and reggae legends UB40.

The shows conclude with the traditional Castle Proms on July 19.

Level 42 are best known for hits such as *Lessons In Love* and *Something About You*.

Medway Council's Howard Doe, said: "We're thrilled Level 42 will be opening this year's Castle Concerts, with special guests Shakatak. It is going to be an 80s night to remember."

"Last year, our 80s concert, which had acts like Tony Hadley and Go West, went down a storm and we're certain that Level 42 will be equally loved."

Dad's Army star set for special Stag show

ONE of the last surviving members of classic TV comedy series *Dad's Army* will reveal some of the secrets behind the show at a special performance in Sevenoaks next month.

Frank Williams, 82, portrayed the vicar, the Reverend Timothy Parthing, in the show and frequently clashed with Arthur Lowe's Captain Mainwaring and his troops from the Walmington-on-Sea Home Guard.

Mr Williams – who, apart from Ian Lavender, who played Private Pike, is the only survivor of the main cast – will perform at the Stag Theatre on May 4.

The show *More Tea Vicar?* is produced and presented by Chris Gidney, who has spent many years in the entertainment and media profession, having written more than 25 showbiz biographies.

Mr Gidney said: "We even plan to show his unique personal film of all the *Dad's Army* cast on tour and get a glimpse of some of his other work."

Mr Williams appeared in *Dad's Army* during its run from 1969 to 1977.

KEA

Biggest borough all set to mark its 40th

A WEEK-long series of events will take place next month to mark the creation of the borough of Ashford – now the county's biggest.

The borough was formed on April 1, 1974, by the merger of the borough of Tenterden with Ashford urban district and the East Ashford, West Ashford and Tenterden Rural Districts.

Since then, it has faced a host of challenges, ranging from being identified as one of the major housing growth areas and the disruption and then potential of the arrival of the high-speed rail service.

Events will take place starting on May 10 to celebrate the anniversary under the '40 Cheers for 40 Years' banner.

It will begin with the Reme Intelligence Corps conducting its Freedom of the Borough march through the town will include a host of arts performances.

Mayor of Ashford David Smith said: "I'm looking forward to communities coming together."

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agenda

What will make next week's headlines...

M25 gets 'smart' as the hard shoulder goes live

FROM Wednesday the Kent section of the M25 gets an extra lane for traffic and embraces so-called 'smart technology' for the first time.

In short, it means the hard shoulder is opened up as an additional lane, with more cameras in place to change speeds and lanes as and when conditions dictate.

The stretch in question is that

running between junctions five and six and seven – Sevenoaks to Godstone in Surrey.

The hard shoulder will be converted for use as a permanent traffic lane and enhanced on-road technology is designed, says the Highways Agency, to manage traffic flow to "improve the reliability of journey times,



providing a boost for businesses and the wider economy".

It follows the deployment of a similar scheme on a stretch of the M25 in Hertfordshire earlier this month.

Euro election hustings set to draw big crowds

A DEBATE on what the European elections will mean for the environment will take place on Hoo this Wednesday.

The event is hosted by the RSPB, Kent Wildlife Trust and CPRE Protect Kent.

Those attending will get the chance to quiz a panel of MEP candidates from across the political spectrum as they

gather for the hustings at High Halstow Village Hall.

Among those taking part will be the Green Party's MEP, Keith Taylor, John Howarth from the Labour Party and Alan Bullion from the Liberal Democrats.

It will be chaired by Chris Corrigan, regional director of the RSPB.

It runs from 7pm to 9.30pm.

...also

Fire crews to walk out

FIRE-FIGHTERS are set to walk out on strike again as part of their dispute over pension plans.

The strikes will take place on Friday between noon and 5pm and then again next Saturday, between 2pm and 2am, and on Sunday at 10am and 3pm.

...and Tube staff do too

THE industrial action will continue on the London Underground this week with a series of walk-outs planned in protest at proposed job cuts.

Talks are in process to avert the action due to take place for 48 hours from Monday.

Heffer at Ukip Q&A

DAILY Mail columnist Simon Heffer will be 'in conversation' with Ukip MEP candidate Janice Atkinson at a special Question Time event hosted by the party on Tuesday.

The meeting takes place at the Grand Hotel on The Leas in Folkestone. It runs from 8pm to 10pm.

Dreamland progresses

THANET District Council will discuss the next stage in the process to find an operator to run the Dreamland heritage park when it opens in 2015.

The council's cabinet will meet on Thursday to agree the formal process of securing a suitable partner.

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CHAOS ON OUR ROADS: When implemented, Operation Stack blocks not only the M20 but all the other roads in the area as motorists try to find alternative routes. Inset, MP Danny Alexander

Could this really be the end of Operation Stack on M20?

The expansion of a Channel Tunnel access road at Cheriton will provide parking for 600 lorries thus easing the regular chaos on one of the county's busiest roads, **Maria Chiorando** investigates...

EUROTUNNEL has unveiled plans which it hopes will finally ease the regular chaos caused by the introduction of Operation Stack on the M20.

Stack is implemented by police when traffic snarls up at the main exit points to the Continent, meaning the backlog of freight lorries have to park on the M20.

But Eurotunnel says it intends to expand its access road off the motorway, with work potentially getting under way as early as this summer. It will create space for potentially hundreds of lorries to park when there are problems.

It comes as part of a series of measures being implemented both at the Channel Tunnel and the Port of Dover to expand their facilities for freight ahead of forecast steady increases in the amount of traffic heading from the UK to the Continent – our main trade market.

Unveiling the plans during a visit to Eurotunnel's Cheriton site on Wednesday, chief secretary to the treasury, Danny Alexander, also revealed plans for a major power link between France and England.

ElecLink would see power generated in France flow into the National Grid, and allow us to share our sustainable energy supplies.

Mr Alexander, a Liberal Democrat, said: "The plans I've been hearing about to increase capacity on the M20 motorway are ambitious and they are crucial.

"The four new lanes will support the forecast growth in the use of the tunnel and they'll help smooth the flow of vehicles into and out of the south east of England.

"I know that in certain circumstances – problems with the ferries or peak demand – that vehicles end up backing up onto the M20 and I know Kent Police has sometimes to implement Operation Stack on such occa-

sions and use the M20 as a kind of giant lorry park, which causes massive disruption to Kent."

Traditionally, the problems not only see parts of the motorway shut, but places an enormous strain on connecting A-roads as traffic seeks alternative routes to the ports or tunnel.

“ I know Kent Police has to implement Operation Stack and use the M20 as a kind of giant lorry park, which causes massive disruption to Kent ”

Danny Alexander,
Chief secretary to the treasury

At the core of the plan is expanding the access road from the M20 at junction 11a – the dedicated Channel Tunnel exit, between the Canterbury/Hythe and Cheriton exits – to the Eurotunnel terminal.

The access road, which is on land owned by Eurotunnel, will see the addition of four lanes. The total number of access lanes will be increased from three to seven. There are currently two freight lanes and one passenger lane, which will become five lanes for freight and two for passengers.

By increasing access lanes in this way, Eurotunnel hopes to ease traffic flow from and on the M20.

The flow of freight traffic on the M20 can get extremely heavy, and the forecast figures suggest the situation is only going to get worse, with the current flow rate forecast to keep on rising.

A spokesman for Kent Police said of

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the proposals: "We welcome any move by transport operators to help ease the strain on Kent's road network during periods when Operation Stack could be implemented.

"Operation Stack takes a significant amount of police time and resources each year, which we feel would be better used in tackling crime and providing a first class service to the people of Kent."

In addition to widening the access road, Eurotunnel plans to boost its on-terminal lorry capacity.

It currently has space for between 300 and 320 lorries. By expanding the site along the access road, it plans to increase this capacity to almost 600.

John Keefe, director of public affairs for Eurotunnel, said he hoped the proposals would "put an end to the vast majority of the instances of Operation Stack".

Work on the scheme will start later this year, and will take around 12 to 18 months to complete.

The majority of the work will be done during off-peak hours in order to cause as little disruption to services as possible.

Mr Alexander's speech revolved around the improvements it would bring to the UK's infrastructure and that by preparing now for freight increases, it would ensure the nation could capitalise on opportunities which lie ahead.

He added: "By 2020, there'll be another 500,000 trucks using the tunnel each year, and another 4.5 million passengers. That's great news for British businesses looking to export."

Eurotunnel bosses plan to increase passenger capacity by increasing the train departures from every ten minutes to every eight minutes.

When asked about the possibility of another tunnel being built under the Channel, Mr Keefe did not deny it was a possibility, saying that a new tunnel was unlikely to be built soon, "but if traffic keeps on growing as it has in recent years, then who's to say?"

WHAT CREATES OPERATION STACK?



WHEN there is a delay at the ports – most frequently caused by weather or industrial disputes – any slowdown in traditional Channel crossing methods creates a backlog.

And while a pain for holidaymakers, for freight operators it becomes a real issue.

As hundreds – and often thousands – of lorries start to back-up there is no where else for them to go than to park on the M20 motorway.

The police are then forced to close it as the motorway is transformed into a giant lorry park.

The Freight Transport Association describe the Eurotunnel proposals as good but a mere 'sticking plaster' and that long-term solutions need to be in place.

Most often discussed, is the creation of a giant lorry park to accommodate the lorries when the delays occur.

Operation Stack was first implemented around 20 years ago, and has been used on over 75 occasions.

It was recently used in February of this year, when bad weather, including winds of up to 80mph caused the ports to close.

ELECLINK: A SHIFT IN POWER...

THE Channel Tunnel will play a key role in the introduction of the ElecLink plan, also unveiled by Danny Alexander during his visit this week.

ElecLink is an inter-connector – comparable to a giant extension lead – that will run through the tunnel with the capacity to carry 1,000 megawatts (one gigawatt) of electricity in either direction.

The politician said: "Anyone who thinks Eurotunnel is just about transporting goods and people will soon need to think again, because the plan to run a one gigawatt electricity inter-connector to link the French and UK power grids also has huge potential.

"I have heard today how this will help the UK balance the supply and demand of electricity and it's a great example of optimising existing infrastructure through vital new uses."

Because the cable runs through the tunnel, it will have no impact on the marine eco-system. The system requires no pylons, and will cause no damage to the terrestrial environment.

The main benefit of ElecLink is that it offers the quickest solution to the electricity supply and demand dip that the UK is facing. People in Britain are set to increase power demand beyond supply. This means that we need to source power from elsewhere in order to deal with this forecast dip.

France has a surplus of power, which is largely nuclear. It is currently having problems reaching environmental targets, sourcing enough power using methods such as wind turbines.

The plan offers a mutually beneficial system, as Britain can use some of France's surplus power, and France can reap the green benefits

of some of the UK's eco-sources of power.

For example, when more energy than is needed at any given time is generated through wind turbines in the UK, unless it is immediately used, it is wasted, as it cannot be saved.

If this surplus could be used by France, both countries could benefit, without the need to actually generate any extra power.

Plans are for ElecLink to be delivered by the third quarter of 2016, which will coincide with the predicted supply and demand dip.

'Infrastructure' was the buzzword of Mr Alexander's address.

There was an optimistic air, as he described the various advances cultivated in Britain over the last few years.

He added: "We need to realise updating this country's infrastructure won't happen overnight."

Foreign drivers dodging new Dartford Crossing toll fares will be made to pay

By Chris Murphy
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

FOREIGN drivers have been warned – try to cheat the new 'freelink' system at the new style Dartford Crossing and they will be pursued across any border.

Highways bosses in charge of the two tunnels and bridge have promised British taxpayers there will be no hiding place for anyone trying to avoid the tolls.

From October, not only will the crossing fee rise 50 pence to £2.50 for a car, but the familiar toll booths will start to disappear.

It has raised fears that foreign motorists may be able to use the tunnel then head onto the Continent with no efforts made to chase payment.

A spokesman for the Highways Agency said:

"We will be tackling evasion where any drivers – regardless of nationality – do not pay the congestion charge. It will be a key component of the remote payment scheme.

"We will use effective penalty and recovery processes that have been proven elsewhere, such as the London congestion charging and Dublin M50 toll schemes.

"A European debt recovery agency will be used to pursue and recover outstanding charges from vehicles that evade paying the crossing charge.

"Non-UK vehicles only account for around three out of every 100 vehicles that use the crossing and only a small percentage of these are anticipated to be non-compliant.

"A significant proportion of non-UK vehicles are heavy goods vehicles and we expect many commercial vehicles to take up an account because of the discounts available."

The agency says three percent of the 45 million chargeable vehicle movements annually at the Dartford Crossing are non-UK making 1.35 million vehicles.

It calculated 14 per cent of those won't initially pay the fee which is 189,000 vehicles. Assuming all are cars at £2.50 each, that's an initial loss of £472,500 or £1,294 a day, but could be much higher if lorries and commercial vehicles are included.

Paul Watters at the AA said a fresh level of bureaucracy is needed to recover the tolls and penalties.

He told us: "With the old system, everyone paid because they were physically stopped, but that will end with the new system.

"They will be throwing some of the fees away. There will be a lot of foreign drivers who will be unfamiliar with the system who will end up with penalties that are never paid."

The Highways Agency insisted, however: "There isn't a writing-off if someone doesn't pay. All charges will be pursued regardless of whether the vehicle is UK registered or not.

"Road users can avoid incurring any penalty charges by taking up an account and keeping it in credit; or by paying the charge in advance of crossing, or before midnight the day after.

"After this period the penalty charge for non-payment will be £70, reduced to £35 if paid within 14 days. If the penalty charge is not paid within 28 days it will increase to £105."

Night time work on signage started this week ahead of the new remote payment scheme called Dart Charge. Instead of stopping at barriers to pay the crossing charge, drivers will pay online, by text, at selected retail outlets, or phone.

Most of the new signs will remain covered until closer to the date when the new system is introduced.



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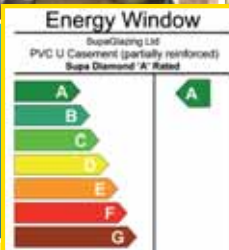
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Village under call to make it

Sarah Linney reports on Chilmington Green, near
almost 6,000 homes and has now been cited as a

PROPOSALS to turn an enormous
development of houses just outside
Ashford into a 'garden city' have been
rejected by the borough council.

A Government body set up to boost
the region's economy has been lobbying for
garden-city status to be awarded to the pro-
posed development at Chilmington Green, just
south-west of the town.

Garden cities are intended to be environmentally-
friendly, attractive places to live, with plenty of
open space, affordable housing and diverse
communities.

Earlier this year, Chancellor George Osborne
revealed that the Government was to push
ahead with plans to build 15,000 homes in a
garden-city development at Ebbsfleet.

But there is massive local opposition to the
development at Chilmington Green, which would
see countryside lost to make way for 5,750
homes, and campaigners say garden-city status
would not make the proposals more palatable.

The tiny hamlet currently has just a couple of
dozen houses, including 11 listed buildings, and
is surrounded by large swathes of agricultural
land.

The garden-city proposal has come from the
South East Local Enterprise Partnership, a body
made up of business people, higher-education
professionals and representatives from local
government.

Chairman Peter Jones said he thought it could
only benefit the area.

"If you introduce the standards that are
applied with garden cities, you get a better
development," he told BBC Radio Kent.

"You get a development which is more spa-
cious and provides for better community faci-
lities, and chances are you also get some financial
and technical support from the Government.

"And why wouldn't you want to have those
advantages if you can have them?"

Garden cities are normally required to have
at least 15,000 homes, but Mr Jones said these
could be split across several sites, meaning
Ashford's garden city could include the Chil-
mington Green development and others pro-
posed in the borough.

"The borough council has already asked for
the development to go forward on garden-city

principles and I think it would be quite feasible,"
he said.

"And we are ready to help with the initial
financing of the infrastructure to make it all
work. We will be prepared to put money in to
do the roadworks on the A28, which will give
better access to the development.

"We hope that what we are doing will be of
general benefit for the development, for Ashford
and its people, and for those who are eventually
going to live there."

There has been massive local opposition to
the Chilmington Green proposals since they
were announced four years ago.

Some 8,000 people signed a petition against
them and 87 per cent of people living in the
parish opposed the proposals in a referendum.

The countryside around Ashford is consid-
ered by many to be some of the most beautiful
in Kent and the development site is home to a
tremendous variety of wildlife, including great
crested newts, water voles and brown hares.

Retired contract manager John Durrant, 74,
lives in the hamlet and is a member of Keep
Chilmington Green, the campaign group fight-
ing the plans.

"Not only is Chilmington Green very pictur-
esque – it dates back to Roman times – but these
proposals will destroy thousands upon thou-
sands of acres of farmland," he said.

"Of course we need housing, but there are
hundreds of acres of brownfield sites which still
have not been developed, like Victoria Way, the
old railway works and the old market.

"We are completely blighted. Houses in

**“ We hope that what we
are doing will be of general
benefit for the development,
for Ashford and its people, and
for those who are eventually
going to live there ”**

Peter Jones, chairman of the
South East Local Enterprise Partnership



THREATENED: Council proposals would see almost 6,000 homes built at Chilmington Green

siege rejects a garden city

Ashford, which has already been earmarked for potential site in a Government flagship project

Chilmington Green are now unsaleable because no one knows exactly what's going to happen.

"We spoke to an estate agent who said it was a waste of time to try to sell our house and was not prepared to take it on.

"We went into Ashford and out to the rural areas with the petition and people were more or less queueing up to sign it, but Ashford council has totally ignored us."

He described the idea of garden-city status as "just a sweetener on the pill".

"Nothing has actually changed and I don't have any confidence in it," he said.

"The developers will only build what is economic. When push comes to shove they will have

to make the development a higher density because otherwise they will not make any money."

He said he feared the homes could be left unsold because there was not enough work available in the area.

"There's not much in the way of jobs in Ashford unless you commute up to London," Mr Durrant said.

"There's a difference between demand and economic demand. Everyone wants a house, but how many people have the means or the desire to actually buy when there are no jobs?"

"When you think of places like Spain and

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Ireland, houses were being built left, right and centre – then the recession hit and they ended up with lots of empty homes. We could be in a similar situation.

“There isn’t very much we can actually do, but I just hope and pray that something will either slow it down or stop it.”

Fellow campaigner Maggie Tolhurst said garden-city status would not offer anything that Ashford council had not already promised.

“The council has been trying to convince us for four years that it’s going to be a wonderful development,” she said.

“It’s going to be spacious, it’s going to have a community feel, all the road improvements are going to take place, all the facilities will follow and it will get all the financial support it needs.

“Garden-city status doesn’t make any difference... and I think it’s a silly name anyway.”

However, Ashford Borough Council said the development was too small to be a garden city.

In a statement, it said: “While Chilmington Green will not be a garden city in terms of its size, it will reflect some of the design principles of the successful garden cities, such as tree-lined streets and a spacious layout.

“It will include major areas of open space, schools, community facilities and places to work, so it is a well-balanced community – not a housing estate.”

The council denied it did not care about local opposition to proposals.

“The principle of development at



IDYLLIC: Ashford council has refuted claims by campaigners, saying the development is too small to be a garden city

Chilmington Green was established working with representatives of the local community and other stakeholders several years ago,” it added.

“An independent planning inspector tested and supported the principle of development at Chilmington Green last year and considered all the issues and evidence including the petition. He found the plan to be sound.

“No decision on where to allocate land for more than 5,000 homes is easy, but it is simply not true that there are sufficient brownfield sites

available as an alternative to Chilmington – those that do exist, such as the old railway works at Newtown, are already under construction.

“We recognise the strong feelings that have been expressed against the principle of development. However, nearly 10 years of careful planning points firmly towards a development at Chilmington Green as being a key component in meeting the borough’s growth needs and playing a major role in ensuring it continues to thrive and prosper.”

The council also confirmed that 30 per cent of the development’s homes would be affordable.

“Because of the high early costs of providing the infrastructure needed for a site of this size, it is likely the scheme will only be able to afford a lower level of affordable housing in the initial stages,” the statement added.

■ **What do you think? Join the debate.** Write to: The Editor, KoS, Apple Barn, Hythe Road, Smeeth, Ashford TN25 6SS. Or email editorial@kosmedia.co.uk.

Affordability is not on agenda

THE issue of affordable homes raised its head again this week when planning minister Nick Boles admitted that the Government was making no statutory requirement on the number of homes in the Ebbsfleet garden-city plans being ‘affordable’.

Instead, it would be down to local councils to decide what proportion, if any, should exist.

Hugh Ellis, head of policy at the Town and Country Planning Association, said the majority of homes should be affordable to tackle the housing crisis and that at least half of those should be social rent.

Mr Ellis said: “We urge the Government to make the most of the opportunity that garden cities present to address the ever-escalating housing crisis across the UK and to ensure that all of the key principles are embedded into proposals for garden cities so that local authorities can deliver high-quality, sustainable and inclusive communities that will make a real difference.”

The association says some 240,000 new homes are needed every year to satisfy demand, but that currently less than half of that are being built.

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FORMER ZOO KEEPER: Dave Risley of The Folly Wildlife Rescue Trust is keen to educate everyone to the many dangers creatures like these hedgehog babies face on a daily basis

Patient numbers on the up at county's wildlife rescue centre

The Folly Wildlife Rescue Trust began life in a Tunbridge Wells garden 20 years ago, it now treats 3,500 creatures every year and has more than 50 volunteers, but as **Caroline Read** discovers it is man and our pets that are the greatest dangers to our native species...

EVER wondered just what happens when you see wildlife in distress? Just where are they treated?

Wildlife rescue centres are few and far between – and there is only one covering our county – but those that do exist are finding their services called upon more and more.

The Folly Wildlife Rescue Trust, based in the Broadwater Forest near Tunbridge Wells, admits some 3,500 animal casualties each year.

With a new purpose-built hospital, opened two years ago but soon to be doubled in size, the operation is a world away from how it was originally set up. 20 years ago, in the garden of Dave and Annette Risley's cottage in nearby Eridge.

The couple have always been interested in animals – she worked for an animal charity and he was a keeper at London Zoo – but neither of them imagined they would go on to create Kent's only wildlife rescue centre.

"My wife worked for Animal Aid in Tonbridge," explains Mr Risley, "which is actually a campaign group, but people thought it sounded like a rescue centre so they'd occasionally turn up there with injured animals."

"She'd get presented with pigeons and the odd hedgehog and take them home. That's how it began and dur-

ing the next five years it started to take over a bit.

"We found we'd need a bit of help, so in the late 1990s we started having a couple of people volunteer with us."

"By then it had already become a seven-day-a-week thing because people knew we were there, turning up any hour of the day."

By 2000 the couple had made rescue work their day jobs, registered as a charity and started fund-raising.

They were already taking in some 1,500 animals a year by that point and more pens, sheds and aviaries were going up in their gardens.

A few years ago the couple realised they had reached a point where their

home was no longer their own and they started the long process of looking for a new site on which to build a state-of-the-art animal hospital.

Mr Risley said: "We also needed the funds to buy it, of course, so it took a while."

"It was a concept really that we were trying to sell to people. We had a bit of luck along the way too; I managed to get some grant-making trusts to pledge money towards the development. That took seven or eight years."

The new hospital is impressive to look at. The site of an old, disused plant nursery on Fairview Lane in the heart of the Broadwater Forest, it's peaceful, spacious, modern and just down the road from the Risleys' home.

The land itself cost £100,000 to buy and the organisation is building it in sections as it raises the money.

The first stage was to create the main building; a reception and main hospital unit which opened in 2012.

Then a planning application went in for a series of wooden stable blocks to be used as staff rooms, training rooms, a high-tech veterinary suite and several outdoor units to house injured birds and badgers prior to release.

The bare bones of these buildings have just been installed in the last few months and one of the units has been

taken by fellow wildlife charity The Fox Project, previously based in Pembury, which now also takes care of all the foxes that come into the centre.

As you would expect after more than 40 years working with animals, Mr Risley is experienced enough to have developed some medical skills and the hospital is permitted to hold certain medication, including painkillers, but many sick and injured creatures need to be treated by a trained vet.

At the moment that is done at a vets in Crowborough, just over the East Sussex border, but it is hoped that once they have more equipment Folly will be able to attract a part-time volunteer vet to work on site.

The charity is in the process of building the vet suite at the moment and aims to have an x-ray machine, ultrasound and blood testing equipment eventually.

Luckily for Folly, volunteers have never been in short supply.

As well as around 50 volunteer collection drivers, who go out to pick-up birds and animals from members of the public who are unable to bring them in themselves, the charity has

“ In the late 1990s we started having a couple of people volunteer. By then it had become a seven-day-a-week thing – people were turning up at any hour... ”

Dave Risley,
The Folly Wildlife Rescue Trust

KEA

several volunteer rescuers who tackle the hard-to-catch animals.

In the centre itself there can be several hundred volunteers on the rota in the summer time, with many on placement from Hadlow College's animal husbandry courses.

"Some people come along for a little while and then drift off and some people's circumstances change, but we generally find people love volunteering here.

"There is an awful lot of cleaning out though; it's not very glamorous.

"Every morning we clean out all the cages and the next day you come back and have to do it all again.

"Then there's the feeding. In the summer months we can have up to 200 baby birds in at one time and from six o'clock in the morning until last thing at night each of them needs feeding every 20 minutes.

"It's painstaking work and there's a lot more to it than people think."

Mr Risley's background caring for animals meant he had a head start when it came to all this hard work.

In his 23 years at London Zoo, he was head keeper of reptiles and collection manager of lower vertebrates, but these days he rarely sees exotic animals, although he says the centre has had several foreign spiders and small frogs that were found in fruit containers.

"And of course, there was the time we found a vulture on the roof of our cottage," says Mr Risley.

"It had escaped from a show in Nottingham and obviously stopped at our place because it spotted all the aviaries.

"We caught it after a few days and



BROCK BADGER: Annette Risley, who with husband Dave, founded the charity The Folly Wildlife Rescue Trust

we managed to get in touch with the owner.

"We also had a raccoon in a while back. One of our people went out to rescue that; it was reported as a badger in an out-house.

"It had been attacked by something and we ended up having to remove one

of its eyes, but that went off to a specialist raccoon rescue place. They're not native to the UK and nobody had any idea where it had come from."

What inspires Mr and Mrs Risley to do this work is the fact that much of the harm inflicted on wild animals is caused by people.

Hedgehogs in major decline

"THEY say that in the 1950s there were 30 million hedgehogs in this country and it's now down to under a million," Dave Risley explains.

"That's disastrous. We're just building too many houses in areas that used to be green and all these new houses have tiny gardens and close-board fencing so hedgehogs can't travel easily.

"The gardens people tend to have these days are sterile and don't have anywhere for hedgehogs to feed or rest. Some, of course, are run over and others get caught in netting or fall down drains. Lots are poisoned with slug pellets.

"If anything major happens, like a disease strikes the hedgehog population, they'll just be wiped out.

"People come into the centre saying they used to see loads of hedgehogs but they haven't seen them for years and I say 'that's because they're gone' and they're gone probably forever.

"There's nothing we can do unless you start stopping certain kinds of fencing, ban building, ban slug pellets. It's a terrible situation."

"We also get a lot of hedgehogs and toads that have been strimmed because they were hiding in the long grass. And, of course, so many things are hurt on the roads. People just need to take more care."

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“ Many of the animals and birds we get have been injured by domestic cats... We also get a lot of hedgehogs and toads that have been strimmed...”

Dave Risley,
The Folly Wildlife Rescue Trust

by asking for donations and applying for grants. Mr Risley does this fundraising himself and that alone can be a full-time job.

“They say we’re a nation of animal lovers,” he says, “but we’re very selective. Wildlife rescue is the poor relation. People are far more interested in dogs and cats.

“What’s ironic is that people’s interest in wild animals abroad even comes before our own native wildlife. “Everyone thinks about pandas and polar bears but aren’t as keen on foxes, badgers, grass snakes. We don’t really appreciate what we’ve got in this country.”

Hospital supervisor Antonia Blacker says: “It’s crazy really because we’re taking in about as many animals at the moment as Dave and Annette used to have in their garden at home.

“They put up with all that for so long, but they do it because they’re just good people.”

■ To contact Folly Wildlife Rescue phone 01892 543213 or visit www.follywildliferescue.org.uk.

TOP 10 MAN-MADE THREATS TO WILDLIFE

Folly Wildlife Rescue says millions of wild animals and birds are killed or injured each year due to human activities. Here are some of their guidelines to make sure you’re helping rather than hurting wildlife in your area...

1 CARS: Cars kill millions of animals, including hedgehogs, foxes and badgers. Help save lives by keeping your speed down and remaining vigilant. Folly recommends that 45mph is fast enough on country roads. Don’t forget that a high-speed collision with a large animal like a deer can risk human lives too.

2 DOMESTIC CATS AND DOGS: Dogs have been known to attack pheasants, ducks, deer and badgers. If you’re walking in the country be aware of this and keep your animal under control. Cats, on the other hand, are always out hunting without human supervision and while it’s impossible to stop them catching mice, voles, birds etc altogether, a

bell fitted to their collar gives a lot of small animals a fair warning. Folly also recommends that you keep your cat in at night.

3 MOWING & STRIMMING: Check the area before you begin to cut. Hedgehogs often sleep out in the open in summer and toads, frogs and slow-worms may be present too.

4 PLASTIC CAN HOLDERS: These can easily get caught round the necks of animals and birds. Cut them into pieces before disposing of them safely in a bin.

5 GARDEN NETTING: This is a major cause of entanglement. Keep garden netting well

clear of the ground, check it regularly and take it down when it’s not in use.

6 TREE PRUNING: Normal hedge trimming shouldn’t disturb birds but avoid all major work between the months of March and September as that’s when birds are nesting. Folly admits hundreds of baby birds a year due to people cutting down trees with nests in them. It is actually illegal to interfere with any nesting bird.

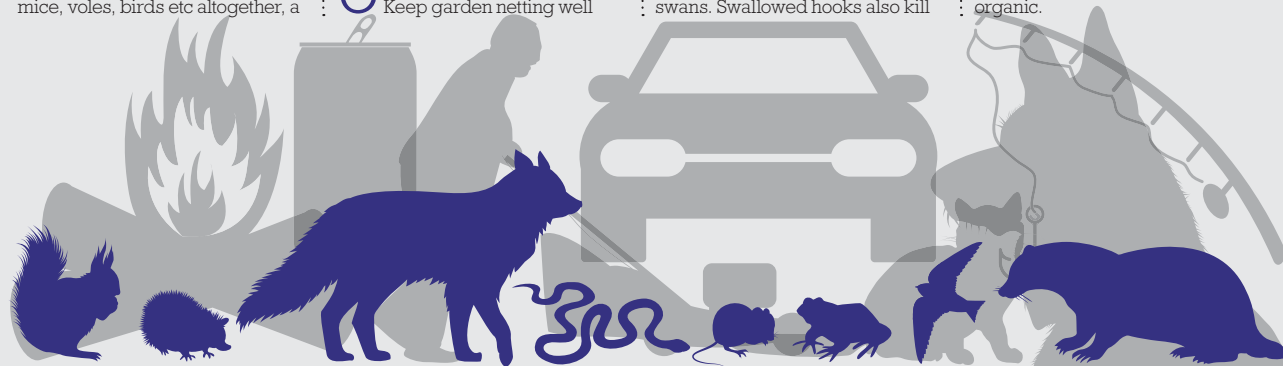
7 FISHING LINE & HOOKS: Entanglement in abandoned fishing line causes a vast number of deaths each year, particularly of ducks, geese and swans. Swallowed hooks also kill

animals, including dogs. Collect fishing equipment and dispose of it responsibly.

8 BONFIRES: Check carefully before lighting as hedgehogs particularly like to hibernate in piles of dry leaves.

9 PONDS & SWIMMING POOLS: Ensure there is an escape ramp as many animals drown in steep-sided ponds and uncovered pools.

10 SLUG PELLETS AND PESTICIDES: Folly’s advice is do not use slug pellets. As well as hedgehogs, they kill songbirds and domestic pets. Cut down on pesticides and go organic.



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How you can help hospice in

It provides an essential service to families facing their most difficult challenges, but it comes at a high



CHILDREN'S hospice Demelza is gearing up for its most significant fundraising event of the year – and is appealing to the people of Kent to get involved.

Kent on Sunday is this year lending its support to the Go Dotty campaign which looks to raise as much money as possible with a flurry of fundraising fun, which this year takes place between June 13-20, to coincide with Children's Hospice Week.

The charity's headquarters is a 10-bed hospice in Bobbing, near Sittingbourne, which provides a wide range of hospice and care services to children, young people and their families.

Life-limited or life-threatened children, or young people, and their fam-

ilies benefit from a wide range of facilities including a multi-sensory room, hydrotherapy pool and a host of other special features.

It also has a centre in Eltham and offers services in East Sussex too.

But it doesn't come cheap, with total running costs coming in at around £9 million.

Damian Leonard, head of marketing at Demelza, explained: "Go Dotty is one of our biggest and most popular charity events. It embraces everyone.

"And the most important thing is that every single penny we raise means the world to us.

"Whatever you do, however small, it's so important we get your support."

■ For more information, visit the website - www.demelza.org.uk

CASE STUDY: FIVE-YEAR-OLD STANLEY

CLAIRE and Clint's son Stanley has had 23 operations and he's only five. Claire explains how Demelza has helped them to get away from the medical side of his condition and focus on fun, family time.

I HAD my 20 week scan and it showed an increase in the ventricles in the brain.

They couldn't say what it was but only that there was a slight variant.

But as soon as Stanley popped out he looked different, he didn't look anything like our first child.

He had massive protruding eyes and he was having breathing problems.

We were told that they thought he had a rare condition called Crouzon Syndrome, a fusion of the skull which prevents the skull from growing normally.

He underwent scans and tests and the condition was sadly confirmed.

Within six weeks

Stanley had deteriorated. He was not feeding. He was getting smaller and smaller and sicker and sicker.

He couldn't breathe and he was starting to get pressure on his head and reflux.

At six weeks, he was rushed to Great Ormond Street Hospital.

An airway was put in, which he still has now, and an NG tube (allowing him to feed) was fitted for feeding which he ended up having for 18 months.

In poor little Stanley's five years he's had 23 operations and he has 32 consultants looking after him. He was on life support when he was only two months old.

He's had operations for his airways, to relieve the pressure in his head. He's had six surgeries connected to the shunt in his head.

He had three bouts of meningitis, caught the norovirus and swine flu. I didn't know how he pulled through. He's got such a good

temperament considering what he goes through.

He is also very unsteady on his feet, he's partially blind in one eye and he's been diagnosed with global development delay – a failure to develop key 'milestone' skills such as sitting up, talking, walking, crawling, becoming toilet trained, for example.

He has a suction machine which

“You're at ease as we can go there together as a family knowing that someone is taking care of Stanley”

he needs with him at all times to keep his airways clear. He needs to be checked all the time, even at night from anything from every half an hour to every 10 minutes. We sleep very lightly.

A few of his night carers mentioned Demelza and we went for a visit.

Demelza was the first place we were able to go swimming together as a family. A really big achievement.



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cost. The Go Dotty event aims to help , writes **Chris Britcher**



AT EASE: Five-year-old Stanley (left) with his brother and sister – all benefit from Demelza's caring environment

It's a place for our eldest daughter, Harriet to go. She's made some lovely friends up there. It's an exciting thing for her. She loves it.

It's nice to go there. It takes away that medical side.

You're at ease as we can go there together as a family knowing that

someone is taking care of Stanley.

He loves the art room, he loves music, he loves the computer room.

We don't know what the future will hold. Stanley will need more operations. Doctors think that the brain stem is compressing on his spine, causing his unsteadiness.

That would be major surgery.

But Demelza makes it all a bit easier to deal with. It's somewhere we use now and are going to use for a long time, because of Stanley's condition. We love it and it's good to go there as family. It's somewhere we can have had a little break.



Help by buying a T-shirt or making your own bunting

It's easier than ever to get involved with Demelza's Go Dotty campaign this year.

For the first time, the charity is selling specially designed dotty T-shirts from just £5 each – the ideal way to show your support and join in the fun.

The shirts are on sale through the charity's shops or by calling its fund-raising department on 01795 845288.

In addition, the Great Demelza Bunting Challenge is being organised as part of Go Dotty week in a bid to create the longest bunting ever.

All you need to do is knit, sew or cut out a piece or pieces of bunting, string it up and post them to Demelza (marked for the attention of the fund-raising department) or drop them into its Sittingbourne or Eltham hospices.

A spokesman said: "We'd also like people to send in photos of them with their bunting or share them on social media use #dottybunting. We will have bunting templates available on our website www.demelza.org.uk as part of the fund-raising pack."

■ **For more information, contact 01795 845288.**



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‘Whether the weather be fine, Or whether the weather be not’



IT IS an answer we all seek, but few – if any – ever get right... just what will the weather over the summer be like?

After the washout of 2012, last year saw one of the warmest and driest on record as we basked in sunshine.

So, just what can we expect for the coming months?

While the experts at the Met Office pour over charts and satellite images in their bid to identify just what the weather will be like, we consulted those who use a rather less, well, scientific approach.

And, according to David King from Edenbridge, one of the county's top amateur weather forecasters, we can expect a damp start to July and a scorching August.

It's going to be good news for our farmers too, he claims.

But then Dave the Weather, as he likes to be known, uses a rather unusual range of methods to predict future weather patterns.

When did the grass start growing,

What does the summer hold? The Met Office can keep its high-tech computer modelling as we've got Dave the Weather and the sun on holy days, writes **Chris Murphy...**

which holy day saw some sun or otherwise, can all closely relate to weather conditions in the near future, he explained.

He told us: "I use tried and tested methodology."

He claims what happens in summer can be traced back to what happened on Christmas Day the previous year – and it seems we had quite a good one.

He explains: "The sun shone on Christmas Day for three hours which indicates, as it did in 2013, a good grain and fruit harvest."

"This tells me that May will be frost free – or at least no damaging frosts to destroy the blossoms in mid-May and good growing condition for fruit and grain, with rain, sun and heat."

"The Christmas Day sun also sug-

gests the fruit harvest will be very good as it was in 2013 and that good growing and harvest conditions will be in July, August and September.

"Move forward to January 1 this year and we see the grass was growing; therefore, only one hay harvest, as again in 2013, which tells me that the optimum harvest time for hay is weeks two to four in June."

"So good hay making in those weeks equals sunny, dry, warm and calm. Looking at the moons for this period also backs this up."

"It also tells me the growing condition for grass will not be sufficient after June to give a viable second hay crop in September, therefore some dry hot weather will be the maxim."

"As I say, June, for the hay making, expect some reasonable weather it

should be dry sunny and warm.

"However into July, the first two weeks will be wet, very wet. This will, of course, nurture the fruit, crops and grain, to be followed in the last week of July with improving weather, which will then improve to some good weather from the first week of August to about the 17th. Then there'll be thunderstorms."

"How good? Similar to 2003, 2006 and the closing day of the 2012 Olympics. Maybe even a brief heatwave."

"If you look at the Moon forecasts for June, July and August, fit them with the above you will see the pieces of the jig-saw fit together."

"The 11th to 14th of July nearly always gives hot dry days, well 90 per cent of the time."

"Nature is never wrong, it is my in-

terpretation that falls short at times, but all the signs are out there. Ash has sprouted before oak this year, so a splash and not a soak, which means the weather will be dryer."

So just how reliable is Dave the Weather and his somewhat unconventional methods?

He explains: "We are not Luddites – we know our subject. Go back to 1989/1990 and note the similarities within those years and 2013/2014 and see the connections."

"There was three hours sunshine on Christmas Day, then three small snow falls in early May to protect the fruit blossoms from the ice maidens. So do not exclude snow before then as we have had no winter so far this year."

"There is no smoke and mirrors to all of this just a month by month forecast."

"I do not claim to be 100 per cent, but since no-one does what I do, many come to me and ask what is going to happen, and there are very few dissatisfied customers."

FARMER Lester Gosbee, 59, from Manor Farm, Frittenden, uses a slightly more scientific approach, yet he admits his style is done using the "chaos effect".

He told us: "This year has been the warmest since 2007. The spring of that year was followed by an awful summer. I do not expect a repeat this year."

"In both 1990 and 1995 the winters were very wet followed by marathon summers and I think this year may follow that pattern."

"The oak is way ahead of the ash, which from the poem means we will only get a splash of rain. This saying is around 60 per cent accurate."

"This year the best and hottest spells will

An alternative weather prediction... by a farmer

be from mid-July to mid-August hitting 35 degrees Celsius.

"Russia has had a mild winter, so when high pressure over Scandinavia and the Continent blocked the cooler changeable air from the Atlantic it means we will get good summer weather here. It may not be quite as good as last year though."

"I predict each summer month will have below average rainfall, even in September." Mr Gosbee said he makes his forecasts

after gathering a myriad of statistical information using temperature records going back to 1659 and rainfall records back to 1766.

He said: "I go through each month and try to compare how the year will pan out."

"I look for trends. I use folklore with records – this is called the chaos effect."

"One nice one is the fogs in March will beat the frosts in May, but I have worked out a slightly better way of doing this. This year there were 11 fogs in March and I don't believe there will be 11 frosts. But between the 9th and 12 there will be a cold spell with ground frosts and possible air frosts, which gardeners need to be aware of."



Weather and his predictions to test

IT would be easy to write off Dave the Weather as a man with perhaps a little too much time on his hands. Or simply someone who reads too much into nature.

So we put him to the test.

We interviewed him several weeks ago for this article and asked him then what he forecast for Easter... his results were surprisingly accurate.

"Since we have had no daytime frost so far in 2014, Easter will be cold and maybe damp, but nothing like recent hot days. If the sun shines on Christmas Day then it will rain Easter Sunday – a proven and reliable conclusion."

"Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Easter Day weather all reflect on later dates in the year. Yes, they do work too, they are proven. You have to wait and see, but take my word for it."

He added: "If you look at the months from January through to April, 2014, and read the sayings you will see all the omens pointing towards the summer months."

"The weather on Ash Wednesday will give the weather for Lent."

"It was a lovely fine day and that is the reason for the lovely spell of weather during Lent; a good Ash Wednesday also signifies a fertile year – just see how everything is progressing after the floods."

Not that he's always so accurate...

"I forecast a hard cold snowy winter based on all the signs that nature put up," he explains.

"How wrong. Nature put the signs up but I interpreted them incorrectly; it was a hard winter but due to flooding, and not snow. Nature lifted everything off the ground because of flooding – the ground feeding birds had to live off a different diet since all the worms and bugs drowned, and so nature compensated."

"Another two degrees lower and everything would have frozen solid."

"I forecast the start at Boxing Day, it started Christmas Eve, so I was two days off the target looking six months ahead and the effects will still be with us at Easter too... as predicted."



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The top ten festivals for 2014:



SHOWCASE: The Folkestone Triennial's featured artist is Yoko Ono



BLESSINGS: Whitstable's Oyster Festival attracts thousands of visitors



500 EVENTS: Broadstairs Folk Week's headliner is Seth Lakeman

26 Week ending April 27, 2014

YOU know summer is truly just around the corner when the festival season gets under way.

But while the likes of Glastonbury may steal all the headlines as a hot-bed of culture and the arts, there are plenty of other top quality events taking place on our doorstep.

From music to art, food to literature, there is genuinely something for everyone this year.

So, in no particular order, we take a look at ten of the finest and where you can find them this year.

1 Folkestone Triennial

August 30 – November 2
Since its formation in 2002, this event has become one of the county's foremost artistic showcases.

Taking place every three years, it grabs the headlines for its innovative pieces of public art and some of the big names it has managed to attract.

Previous artists commissioned to take part include Tracey Emin and Cornelia Parker. This year's big name is Yoko Ono.

■ www.folkestonetriennial.org.uk

2 Whitstable Oyster Festival

July 26 – August 1
Whitstable's attraction as a tourist destination appears to be showing no signs of dimming with its streets thronged with crowds most weekends during the summer months.

But the jewel in its crown is the annual Oyster Festival which pulls in tens of thousands of people for a week of events and parades.

The highlight is normally the historic landing of the oysters on the beach, which are then blessed before a parade takes them down a High Street lined with spectators.

■ www.whitstableoysterfestival.com

3 Broadstairs Folk Week

August 8-15
While Whitstable has secured a nice reputation for itself, Broadstairs often comes close to eclipsing it. Certainly it is a town where its festivals are becoming hugely popular.

From its celebration of food and drink in the autumn, to its annual folk week, huge crowds will flock to the east coast to take part. This year folk week comprises more than 500 separate events – with big names

such as Seth Lakeman headlining.
■ www.broadstairsfolkweek.org.uk

4 Hop Farm Music Festival

July 4-6
Back with a new promoter and very different look and feel, the three-day event sets up camp in the grounds of the Paddock Wood tourist attraction and is one of the most high profile music events in the county this summer.

Headline acts include Beach Boys' star Brian Wilson, the remarkable Grace Jones and the Kinks' frontman Ray Davies.

Perhaps more significantly, the event is promising to pack a more powerful punch when it comes to things to do and general atmosphere – certainly a failing in years gone by.

■ www.thehopfarmmusicfestival.com

5 Fuse Medway Festival

June 13-15
Billed as an arts explosion, this colourful annual event manages to engage thousands of people with its combination of free arts events, designed to appeal to as wide an audience as possible.

This year's event promises everything from circus acts to public art to theatrical shows across its three days.

It spills out of traditional venues, and aims to transform Medway's streets and open spaces.

■ www.fusefestival.org.uk

6 Local & Live, Tunbridge Wells

August 23-24
From tiny acorns mighty oaks grow – and so it appears to be the case with Tunbridge Wells' live music showcase Local & Live.

Having outgrown its traditional home on the Pantiles, and swelled by support after last year's event had to be cancelled after a lack of sponsorship, this summer's offering is now straddling two days and takes place in the outdoor setting of the town's picturesque Calverley Grounds.

■ www.localandlive.org

7 Faversham Hop Festival

August 30-31
The market town of Faversham has a rich history of agriculture from the countryside which surrounds it and its air is often flavoured with the pungent aroma of hops floating from

the brewery which sits at its very heart.

So it is perhaps little wonder when it combines history and hops – and adds a dash of music, fun and excitement, the resulting mix pulls in tens of thousands of visitors.

Today the festival is the key date on the town's calendar and one which provides ample good cheer for visitors.

■ www.favershamhopfestival.org

8 Cherry Festival, Brogdale

July 19-20
The home of the National Fruit Collection on the outskirts of Faversham is an essential visit for anyone with a soft spot for the county's soft fruits.

But in July, it turns its attention to the world of cherries with two days where everything is cherry-related.

The attractions include the cherry pie eating contest, talks and walks and even guided tours of the orchard where you can see the ripe red fruit growing for yourself.

■ www.cherryfestivalkent.co.uk

9 Sweeps Festival, Rochester

May 3-5
OK, so this may be slightly more spring than summer, but it still packs a colourful punch as thousands take to the street for the annual knees-up.

The event harks back to an era when on May 1, sweeps could leave behind the chimneys for a day and enjoy a day of fun – free from soot.

Today dozens of Morris dancers descend on the town and blend with music, arts and dance to create a vibrant three days.

10 Tonbridge Arts Festival

July 1-6
Celebrating all art forms, the festival sprawls out across a variety of venues across Tonbridge – reminding people that there is a rich heritage in the town.

From artistic performances from professionals to a host of amateur efforts, the town unites for the event and turns out in force to enjoy the array of events on offer.

From guided tours of Tonbridge Castle to poetry workshops and an evening with sculptor Guy Portelli, it aims to cover lots of bases.

■ www.tonbridgeartfestival.co.uk



NEW LOOK AND FEEL:
Hop Farm Music Festival

An explosion of the arts



FAVERSHAM: Hop Festival weekend fun



MORRIS FUN: Rochester's Sweeps Festival



VENUES: Tonbridge Arts Festival offers much
kentnews.co.uk kent-life.co.uk

There's plenty going on across the county this summer – be it live music, art shows and festivals featuring oysters, hops, cherries and even sweeps, as **Chris Britcher** discovers...



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Songs and tears in the final farewell to tragic star Peaches Geldof

By Chris Britcher

chris.britcher@archant.co.uk

FAMILY and friends paid an emotional final farewell to Peaches Geldof last Monday, as a private funeral service took place next to the family home in Faversham.

Among the mourners at the service at the St Mary Magdalene and St Lawrence Church in Davington, were Sarah, the Duchess of York, model Kate Moss, Radio 1 DJ Nick Grimshaw and former Rolling Stones star Bill Wyman.

Her coffin was sky blue with clouds and an illustration of her and her family drawn on the back. It featured Ms Geldof, her husband, their two young sons, and even the family pets.

Her father, Live Aid hero Bob Geldof, was one of those who carried the coffin into the church.

During the service Ms Geldof's widower, Tom Cohen, sang a version of Leonard Cohen's Hey, That's No Way To Say Goodbye. Jools Holland, who lives in Cooling, on Hoo, performed



on piano during the service, while there was also a song from Queen drummer Roger Taylor.

Davington has been home to the Geldof family since the mid 1980s when Bob Geldof moved there with his future wife, the TV presenter Paula Yates.

Since then it has been a refuge for the family from the glare of the media spotlight which has followed the highs and lows of their lives.

Mother-of-two Ms Geldof, 25, was

found dead at her home in Wrotham, near Sevenoaks, on April 7.

A post-mortem held the week after her death failed to identify the cause.

Toxicology tests are expected back soon which it is hoped will shed more light on the cause. Police say they are treating her passing as "sudden and unexplained" but not suspicious.

It is understood her husband raised the alarm when she failed to respond to phone calls.

Mr Cohen, along with the rest of the Geldof family, have not appeared in public since her tragic death.

The church was where, just two years ago, the couple married. Peaches was also christened there. It was also where Mr Geldof and Ms Yates had their marriage blessed in 1986.

It would also be the scene of tragedy too, however. Paula Yates who divorced from Mr Geldof, was found dead in her London flat in 2000 after a heroin overdose. A coroner ruled it 'accidental'. Her funeral was there.

The last thing Peaches Geldof posted on Twitter, the day before she died, was a picture of her as a toddler in her mother's arms.



PEACHES: The 25-year-old was found dead at her home in Wrotham

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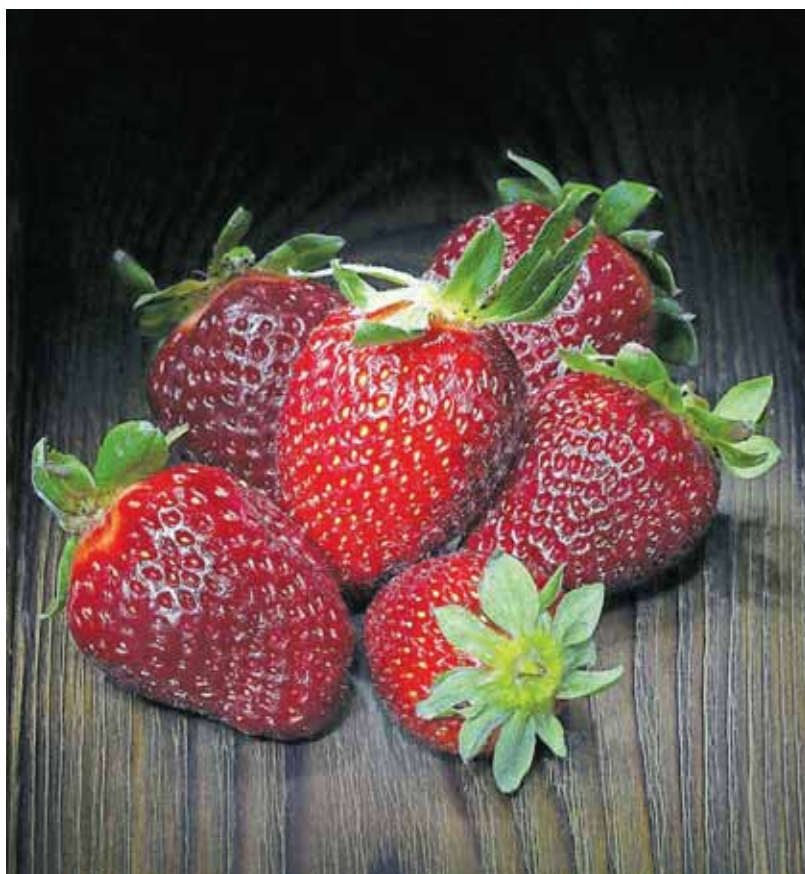
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More than half the country's best are grown by the county's farmers, as **Maria Chiorando** discovers



DELICIOUS: Classic fruit set for a good year as Kent's farmers continue to lead the way

Spring sunshine and mild winter brings an early strawberry crop

A MILD wet winter and bright spring sunshine are delivering one of the earliest crops yet of strawberries to our fruit farmers.

Kent is one of the traditional heartlands of the nation's strawberry crop, with the fruit normally peaking between May and June. But this year crops are delivering top quality fruit already.

Marion Regan works at Hugh Lowe Farms in Mereworth, near Maidstone. It is one of the best-known strawberry farms in the county with a long-standing arrangement to provide the fruit for the Wimbledon tennis championships each year.

She explained: "After a relatively mild winter we have had an early spring with some lovely bright days. Good light levels bring the crop forward."

Generally, British strawberries are available between late April and October.

According to the Kent Agricultural Society, the county produces more than 50 per cent of the highest quality strawberries grown in the UK, with yields increasing three-fold between 2000 and 2011.

So why are Kent's soils so strawberry-friendly? "This is mainly historical," says Dr David Simpson of the East Malling Research Centre, which conducts horticultural research.

"Strawberries are perishable and in the days before cool-chain systems the proximity to the big London wholesale markets was a big advantage. Also, south east England has a drier climate than most other parts of the UK, which was important for producing high quality fruit and avoiding disease problems.

"These factors have now largely disappeared due to refrigerated lorries and polytunnels to keep the plants dry.

"Many of the strawberry farms in Kent are family businesses that have been there for generations but in the last 20 years there have been big increases in farms in other parts of the UK."

There are many varieties of strawberry, and their growth cycle is carefully tailored to the season in order to provide the best fruit.

For example, Hugh Lowe Farms grow eight varieties of the red berry. The 'Vibrant' berry hits the market in April, and the 'Driscoll's Jubilee' variety, said to be the best due to its superior sweetness, aroma and shape, is available from May until October.

Mrs Regan explains: "Strawberries grown outside under tunnels can crop from April to October but we have to use a range of varieties and plant types to crop at different times.

"Strawberries fall into two groups: 'Junebearers' which crop in the early summer, and 'everbearers' such as Jubilee which crop all through the height of summer and into the early autumn.

"By taking these varieties and producing different types of plants, we can trick them into thinking it's a different time of year. So we could – and do – produce some Jubilee early in the year. However the natural peak of the Driscoll's Jubilee season is July to September.

"Theoretically, there is nothing to stop English growers producing strawberries all year round, but in the winter they would of course be grown under glass with artificial heat and light."

And that often comes at a cost which makes imports from foreign climates more cost attractive for the major retailers.

This summer, more than 80 per cent of Kent strawberries will be grown under protection, known as polytunnels. Polytunnels are tubular structures made from a common type of plastic called polyethylene. They act like greenhouses, protecting the plant, and also providing a controlled environment in terms of temperature, humidity and ventilation.

With the primary benefits of polytunnels being their ability to protect the fruit from poor weather and disease, growers are now able to experiment with more delicate varieties of what was once considered to be an 'unreliable' crop.

However, polytunnels are not without their critics; primarily on ground of aesthetics.

Campaigners say the swathes of plastic spoil the beauty of the countryside. Farmers say they allow production to keep jobs and swell the local economy.

Dr Simpson says: "Polytunnels allow growers assured supplies and extend the season for UK production. They have resulted in much greater availability of British fruit, accompanied by big increases in sales and far fewer imports except during the period November to March."

So what's the future of the Kent strawberry?

According to Dr Simpson: "Our growers are very innovative and they are always willing to try new ideas and new varieties.

"I think the next area that will see big changes will be the use of innovative irrigation systems to reduce water use and also improve eating quality of the berries by precision application of the optimum amount of water and fertiliser to the plants at each stage in the production cycle."

Mrs Regan also has exciting news for the future of this favourite berry: "We are excited about a new 'everbearer' called Driscoll's Scarlet which certainly lives up to its name – it's a beautiful berry with excellent flavour.

"But for the early season, there is the equally exciting and relatively new variety 'Vibrant'. Both these varieties were 'born and bred' locally at East Malling Research Station so are ideally suited to our Kentish growing conditions."

After a relatively mild winter we have had an early spring with some lovely bright days. Good light levels also help to bring the strawberry crop forward

Marion Regan,

Hugh Lowe Farms, Mereworth

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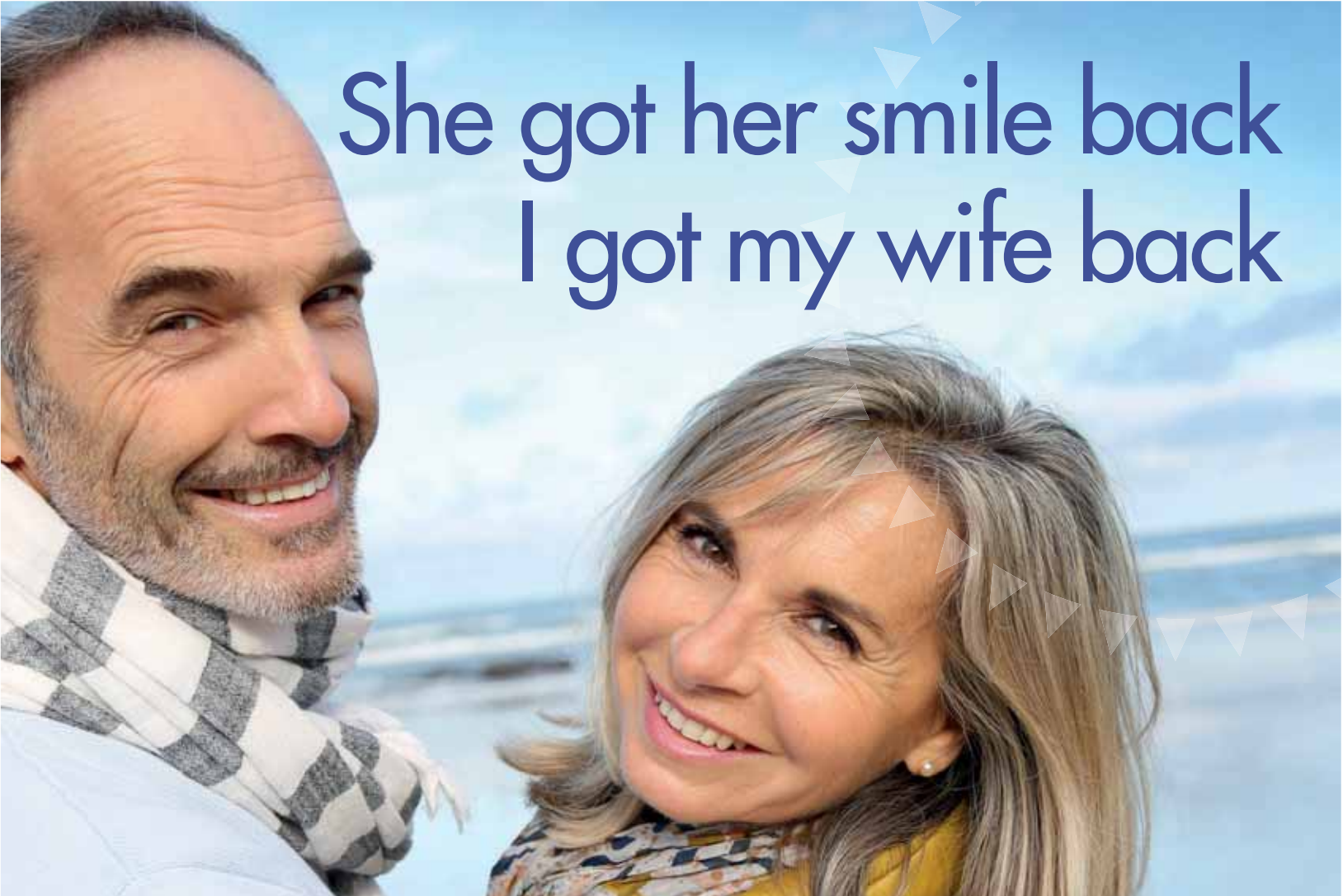
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A photograph of a middle-aged couple smiling at each other on a beach. The man is on the left, wearing a grey and white checkered scarf. The woman is on the right, with grey hair, wearing a patterned scarf. The background shows a beach and the ocean under a blue sky with some clouds. There are decorative white triangles on the right side of the image.

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Blind equestrian's dream of dressage gold at Rio in 2016

By Chris Murphy
editorial@archant.co.uk

VERITY Smith has enjoyed a successful and varied career in her 40 years. A singer-songwriter who has starred in her own stage musical, she's written a book and, now is perhaps aiming for her most remarkable achievement yet – gold at Rio 2016 in one of the mostly competitive equestrian events.

What makes this all the more remarkable is that Verity Smith is blind.

Born in Tunbridge Wells, she was told at the age of eight she had a rare genetic disorder which would leave her blind – and nothing could be done.

Yet she refused to allow it to slow her down and today is taking her life-long love of horses to a new level as she targets Paralympic gold in the dressage event at the games in Brazil.

To do so will go some way to easing the devastation of missing out on a place in Team GB for the London 2012 Games after a string of disasters.

Raised in Langton Green, she was given her first pony at the age of 12.

After school at Bishops Down Primary and then Tunbridge Wells Grammar, at 15 she left to join Exhall Grange School in Coventry

– a special grammar catering for the blind. She has no vision, but she can detect light changes. She explains: "It's kind of like a big snowstorm in my eyes."

"I see light and dark in my left eye and within that sometimes I see shadowy movement, but apart from that, not a lot."

While she continued her schooling she continued her riding, and by 18 was the youngest rider on the British team at the World Para Championships in Denmark.

She explained: "Dressage is my main love – it's ballet on a horse. It is like I am flying when on a horse."

Now 40, she was registered blind at 16.

But hopes of performing at London 2012 were dashed when she was in a car crash on her way to picking up a new guide dog.

The impact with a lorry, in which the driver had nodded off, left her with chest and spinal injuries.

Then, her horse Marcus needed to be put down because it was suffering from cancer. And the replacement mount had a condition called kissing spine. The fates, it seemed were conspiring against her.

The rider explains: "I decided after all year of horror, it was just an unlucky year."

"Lots of people have them but it seemed like everything came at the same time."



DRESSAGE: Verity Smith and her horse Kit are working towards Paralympic dressage glory

"I was very, very disappointed, very, very sad. It was the one time in my lifetime, the Olympics was going to be in London and it looked like being such a beautiful, beautiful event."

Rio in 2016 however, offers another chance of glory.

During training exercises in France, she rides every day under the watchful eye of top coach Max Vendrell.

Picking a new horse was tough. She said: "It was quite an experience. It's like meeting your future husband."

Her new ride eventually came from Sweden. As she took to the saddle of Szekit for the first time, she remembers thinking: "I know this horse is really, really special."

Later she said of the horse she calls Kit: "He's

an absolute gentleman. If he were a man, I would marry him."

"He's a really good guy and even the short time we've been together, I've really begun to trust him."

But her real challenge is to compete and win at a selection of top level events which are closely watched by British Dressage which will ultimately select the Paralympic team. But, it admits, the odds may be stacked against her.

A spokesman explained: "Fair play to her for her ambition, but the likelihood of her competing in Rio is quite slim because she is not currently involved in any of our team programmes."

"There is a long selection process based on results. We have contacted her to help her with what she needs to be doing to get selected."

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Call of the wild for photographers

Wildlife trust's competition wants you to capture the beauty of our county and its creatures, writes **Chris Britcher**

AMATEUR photographers are being invited to take part in a major annual competition designed to capture the splendour of Kent's countryside and coastline.

The Wildlife Photographers of the Year competition is held by the Kent Wildlife Trust.

The prize competition offers four categories: Best Flora; Best Fauna; Best Landscape, Coastline and People; and Best Junior (17 years and under).

Photos must be taken in Kent.

An expert panel of judges, chaired by Phil Hurst of the Natural History Museum Photographic Unit, will be paying special attention to the originality of the shots and the ingenuity of the photographers.

And as you can see from previous

entries, the standard is very high.

The competition is sponsored by The BarnYard restaurant and farm shop at Upchurch, which will host the awards evening in the autumn.

In addition to the prizes, winners get a certificate and have their photos published in the trust's magazine, Wild Kent, on the trust's website and at its visitor centres.

The competition is free to enter, but donations towards the conservation work of the Kent Wildlife Trust "will be appreciated".

The last date for receipt of entries is August 31, 2014.

■ **For an entry form and conditions of entry, go to www.kentwildlifetrust.org.uk, call Kent Wildlife Trust on 01622 662012, or email info@kentwildlife.org.uk for a paper copy.**



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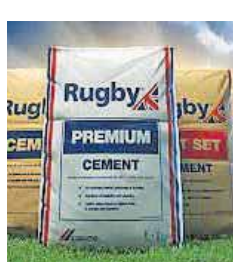
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Downward spiral of our barn owl population threat to their existence

Flooding caused by the recent wet winter not only caused us problems but has had a dramatic effect on the life of one of the UK's most charismatic birds, reports **Maria Chiorando**

THE majestic barn owl was once a symbol of the English countryside, and with its age-old reputation as a savvy hunter, it's a creature whose survival should be assured.

And yet after highlighting a worrying dip in its population in January, the long wet winter and spring has continued to impact on its numbers.

Disputed figures often point to a drop between the 1930s and 1980s of some 70 per cent.

The reality is that ascertaining quite how big a chunk has been bitten out of the population is open to debate.

What everyone is sure of, however, is the numbers across the county – and nationwide – are in decline.

So just what has gone wrong?

David Ramsden MBE is senior conservation officer at The Barn Owl Trust, a charity based in Devon.

He said: "Last year was the worst ever recorded for barn owls, mainly because of the serious flooding diminishing their natural food supplies.

"This year they will hopefully do better, but numbers are still really low."

His opinion is backed by a wealth of hard data. The trust has created a comprehensive report using information from 130 independent groups.

A report of this magnitude has never been done before – it collates four years' findings, from 2009-2013, and paints a worrying picture.

In the report, the trust is largely concerned with the barn owls' nesting occupancy and brood size.

This means independent teams would check known nesting sites for evidence of occupancy, and then count number of owlets to establish an average figure.

In almost every area numbers were down.

Certainly in Kent, the population has diminished in areas like the Romney Marsh and North Kent Marshes, where their numbers were once great.

What was also distressing about the recent findings was the large number of dead barn owls.

Some were found to be significantly underweight, which correlates with the theory that the weather hit their food sources badly.

Not only did their natural diet of

small mammals get hit hard by the floods, but so were the owl's natural hunting grounds. In addition, there was an unseasonably cold March.

Traditionally, spring weather offers wildlife a respite after the normally cold months of January and February.

Unfortunately, March 2013 was the coldest since 1962, which seemed to deter the birds from breeding, despite a significant proportion of them already being in pairs – barn owls mate for life.

It is this combination of high mortality and low birth rates that have left numbers so decimated.

Julian Nash, site manager for the RSPB reserve in north Kent concurs with Mr Ramsden that the weather has affected the owl population, but is slightly more optimistic.

"It may be because of weather conditions such as the flooding this year that we've seen a decrease in barn owl numbers," said Mr Nash.

"Barn owls generally eat small mammals such as rodents, which would have drowned in the floods, so there would have been less food available."

However, they do have a pair of owls breeding on the reserve so far, which they hope will increase over the coming months.

"We have nest boxes on our Great Bells reserve site on the south side of Sheppey and will be adding more.

"Year-on-year the barn owls that have survived have come back to the nesting boxes so next year you might find the numbers go up."

Human intervention is also a major

issue in the general decline of the wildlife population, with the current trend for reducing food miles being a seemingly tenuous link to our bird numbers.

It is, however, significant...

As people strive to eat only local produce, more pressure is put onto already struggling farmers to squeeze as much as possible from every corner of their land.

According to Mr Ramsden: "Government cutbacks mean there is not enough money for farmers creating wildlife habitats.

"It's really hard for the birds to survive, and we've seen the farmland bird index [a system of measuring the populace of 37 species of farmland birds] decrease by 50 per cent since 1970."

Simply put, with EU caps imposed on wildlife grants, farmers can no longer afford to leave swathes of land for nature; they must use every inch to grow crops.

This is squeezing the owls out of their natural habitats meaning they don't have anywhere to live safely.

Young owlets are frequently found dead by motorways and large roads, due to the increasing lack of suitable nesting areas far enough away from these dangers.

This contributes to the high mortality rate.

The Barn Owl Trust suggests that 70 per cent of young owls die within their first year, with the average life expectancy being just 18 months.

In the wild, the maximum life expectancy for a barn owl is around five years, though in a protected environment they can live to around 20.

“ The Government's cutbacks mean there is not enough money for farmers creating wildlife habitats. It's really hard for the birds to survive ”

David Ramsden MBE, senior officer at The Barn Owl Trust

Farming is also a factor in another key issue facing barn owls. And, in particular, the extensive use of rat poisons.

The owls' natural prey includes mice and rats.

When they eat poisoned rodents, they are, in effect, ingesting the poison themselves, and over the long term the doses become deadly, often leading to death from internal bleeding.

It is claimed 84 per cent of barn owls have ingested rat poison, although the exact mortality rate from consumption is unknown.



ENDANGERED: Barn owls are becoming less and less of sight in the county

The poison problem has been embraced by nature enthusiast Bill Oddie. The former Springwatch presenter said recently: "Barn owls are widely loved and charismatic birds that are facing a deadly danger.

"The Government must resist the pressure put on it by the poison industry, and introduce strict legislation to curb and control the use of these killer chemicals."

The campaign to regulate poison use continues.

Meanwhile, for many, concerns will

continue for those who claim our continued urban sprawl is having an impact of the wildlife which inhabits it.

However, with the various trusts and charities taking a long-term view on the owl population, there is some hope this once flourishing species can again prosper.

Ultimately though the reality is sobering.

In terms of the future of barn owls Mr Ramsden says: "We're optimistic that they're doing better this year, but we're not optimistic for the future."



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Venice's independence being masterminded in... Tonbridge

By Maria Chiorando

maria.chiorando@archant.co.uk

FAR from sinking, Venice actually appears to be rising as an independent republic... or at least trying to with an ambitious bid for freedom being fought on the city's behalf.

And it all started and is continuing to be led from a modest town house in... Tonbridge.

The political uprising is the brain-child of Venice-born, and now Kent-based psychiatrist Giovanni Dalla-Valle.

He leads the campaign for a Republic of Venice, despite living some 680 miles away – as the crow flies – from the famously picturesque Italian city which sits on stilts and is criss-crossed with waterways.

He wants to see the city he describes as a "one-time economic super power" liberated from Italy.

So now Dr Dalla-Valle runs the 'Republic of Venice Embassy' from his Kent home.

He wants Venice to become its own self-contained, self-governed and self-financed state. What's more, he believes it should form one of a new breed of small independent states making up Europe.

He told KoS this week: "Going independent has actually been a trend for small countries since 1945 with probably something close to a quarter of today's countries being created since."

"Roughly 15 new countries have popped up in Eastern Europe in the last 20 years alone."

It's true that Italy is a famously 'regional' country; each area having its own distinct character and culture.

Dr Dalla-Valle added: "Italy has always worked better with localised models of communities and counties which it was composed of in late medieval times."

The spark which lit the fire is a somewhat odd one.

He met an elderly lady at Mestre train station

– on the Italian mainland near Venice. He says she was impeccably-dressed, and held herself with an air of wealth and confidence.

"But it was just a veneer. Her face was in despair, and she cried as she asked to borrow money in order to buy a ticket to get home."

Moved by her plight, Dr Dalla-Valle gave the woman, who he regarded as a version of his own mother, all the money he'd just withdrawn from a cash point.

He knew at this point, he says, that his life would change, and as soon as he returned home, he began shedding the trappings of wealth, selling his sports car and half of his properties, exchanging a lucrative full-time job for part-time work, and buying himself time.

He now devotes that time to the cause.

Like much of Europe, Venice was hit hard by the recession, and it is still struggling due to the austerity cuts imposed by the last government.

Dr Dalla-Valle points to closing businesses, suicide rates on the up and soaring unemployment among the young which is seeing more and more head to the mainland.

As Dr Dalla-Valle puts it: "This situation could not go on without some kind of local mass rebellion."

He relinquished his Italian nationality some time ago, but the ties to Venice are still strong. As with many Venetians, Dr Dalla-Valle claims to have 'never felt Italian.'

Despite running the campaign from Kent, Dr Dalla-Valle has visited his homeland nearly 35 times in the last year. With the miles racking up so quickly, does he think he is at a disadvantage running the campaign from Kent rather than Italy?

"To be able to work for the cause from 1,000 miles away is actually an advantage," he claims.

"The politicians tend to be quite jealous and they desperately struggle for power."

"By being so distant it is actually much easier to help our people working through social and political projects with peace of mind."



REPUBLIC: Giovanni Dalla-Valle says being away from Venice makes it easier for him

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Fracking could 'open countryside up to a host of environmental damage'

Campaign group criticises new report on plans for shale-gas exploration and warns county's precious water resource could be at risk from the 'dash for gas', writes **Chris Murphy**

A REPORT that claims Britain needs 4,000 fracking sites has been attacked by Kent environmentalists.

It is widely tipped that a big part of the Weald basin in the county will be targeted by shale-gas explorers.

Protect Kent, however, says the plan is misguided.

The report, commissioned by the UK Onshore Operators Group (UKOOG) and conducted by consultancy firm EY, says that the industry will need £33 billion of investment but could produce more than 64,000 jobs.

UKOOG's report, Getting Ready for UK Shale Gas, says work is needed now to lay the foundations for the necessary infrastructure, supply chain standards and skills requirements before developers look overseas.

Fracking sees the injection of water and chemicals into shale rock to free gases and oils.

Criticisms of the method, which is used on a massive scale in America,

are that the disturbance of large underground areas can cause tremors, and the chemicals used can pollute water tables, either by themselves or releasing gas into aquifers.

Waste by-products are also said to be dangerous.

However, it could provide the UK with an enormous natural-energy resource, lessening our reliance on areas such as the Middle East and promising lower energy prices.

There are currently four PEDLs, or Petroleum Exploration and Development Licences, in the Kent coastal areas around Dover and Folkestone, plus four more on the Kent/Surrey border near Lingfield and a final large zone called Northdown that spreads into Greater London and Surrey.

Hilary Newport, director of Protect Kent, the local branch of the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England, said: "We are increasingly concerned by the focus on potential economic benefits being promulgated by groups like UKOOG.

"The word 'potential' is our focus in this report. These benefits cannot be guaranteed and, in fact, many within the industry such as Cuadrilla [the oil and gas exploration and production company] have acknowledged shale-gas extraction simply will not lead to lower energy prices.

"However, if the Government does press ahead with its dash for gas, we are opening our countryside up to a host of environmental damage as a result, as well as its guaranteed industrialisation, with more HGV movements along narrow lanes, large pipes to take the gas away and development in places it simply should not be allowed.

"There are particular concerns over the risk to our precious water resources in Kent, which is already seriously water-stressed, according to the Environment Agency.

"Kent's underlying geology is characterised by a high density of faults and there is no way in which any operator or regulator can anticipate



HEATED DEBATE: Shale-gas exploration has proved to be a divisive subject

the reactivation of a geological fault, which would lead to the escape of contaminants into underground water resources. Once triggered, there is little that can be done to control or alleviate that contamination.

"We want to be certain a rigorous, evidence-led debate has taken place and a strong regulatory environment has been put in place before the Government commits to shale-gas exploi-

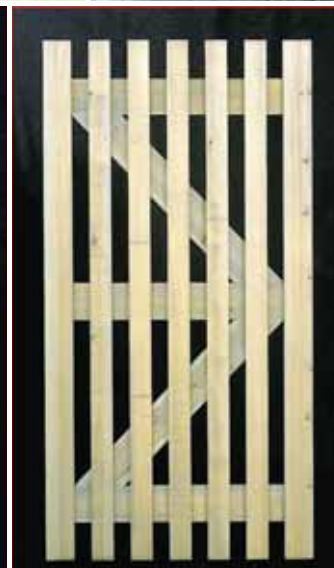
tation so that 'potential' environmental damage doesn't become a reality."

Backing the report, Ken Cronin, chief executive of UKOOG, said: "We are building an industry in this country which will not only potentially give the UK energy security and make a big contribution in tax revenues but will also bring immense benefits to other industries and create sustainable, well-paid jobs."

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Nursing teams to offer teenagers meningitis vaccination at schools

Maria Chiorando reports on initiative to provide 13- to 15-year-olds with jab to protect them against killer disease

A CAMPAIGN has been launched in schools aimed at getting teenagers vaccinated against the potentially deadly brain bug meningitis.

The meningitis C vaccine booster defends against the meningococcal infection, which can lead to meningitis or septicaemia – blood poisoning – both of which can be fatal.

Although babies are now routinely vaccinated at three months, with a booster dose given at 12 months, it is believed that the effectiveness of the vaccine wears off.

Now health chiefs are keen to ensure children aged between 13 and 15 receive another booster dose to protect themselves going through their teens, where evidence has suggested there is a rise in cases as the first dose wears off.

So far, the vaccination programme has been successful in cutting the numbers of reported meningitis cases

drastically since its inception in 1999, when all babies started to be immunised against the disease.

Diane Corderoy of the Kent Community Health NHS Trust said: "Our school nursing teams will be visiting schools throughout Kent from the end of April until July to make sure as many children as possible receive the booster and continue to remain protected against this devastating and potentially fatal disease."

Dr John Rodriguez, screening and immunisation lead of the Kent and Medway area team, added: "The meningitis C vaccine programme can prevent one of the main causes of meningitis."

"Meningitis is a very serious illness caused by infection around the brain. If not diagnosed early, infection can lead to permanent disability or death."

"I strongly advise Year 10 teenagers to protect themselves by having the injection against meningitis C when offered it by the school nurses."

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

In children:

- A very high fever with cold hands and feet
- They may feel agitated but not want to be touched
- They may cry continuously
- Some children can become very sleepy and it may be difficult to wake them up
- They may appear confused and unresponsive
- They may develop a blotchy red rash that does not fade when you roll a glass over it

In older children and adults:

- Severe headache
- Vomiting
- High temperature of 38C (100.4F) or over
- Stiff neck
- Sensitivity to light
- Rapid breathing
- A general feeling of being unwell
- A distinctive skin rash (although not everyone will have this)

It is important to note that not everyone will get all of the above symptoms.
Source: NHS

"However, please don't forget that there are other infections that cause meningitis and septicaemia so everyone should stay vigilant and seek help or advice immediately if worried."

There were some 995 meningitis C cases between 1998 and 1999, but when meningitis C became part of the routine immunisations for babies in 1999, cases dramatically reduced

year on year, due to a high uptake of the vaccine.

Between 2011 and 2012 there were just 29 cases reported. Many of these were in adolescents.

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Changing face and traditions of our May Day celebrations

Once it was a day out of the soot-filled chimneys, today it is a family event with its roots firmly in centuries gone by.

Chris Murphy on the Sweeps Festival

AS SCHOOLS and local authorities contend with another spike in the population of children, the problem in days gone by sparked far more serious concern.

Form the late 18th century children were forming a major part of the population – accounting for almost two out of five people by the mid-1820s.

As the numbers grew so did those who became orphaned or abandoned. Many found themselves put into the care of employers who would support them... but in exchange for them working to earn their keep.

Factories frequently saw children employed, but it was perhaps chimney sweeps whose use of youngsters would become most infamous and ultimately spell a change in the law.

Climbing boys, as they were known, were used to climb into and clean chimneys when the use of open fires was the primary source of heating for many homes and businesses.

It was not only hard work in cramped conditions, but dangerous too. Deaths when they fell were not unusual – nor illness caused by working in such spaces.

By the second half of the 18th century concerns were already being raised about the use of children and in 1788 a law was passed specifying children had to be at least eight-years-old to be employed.

Few, however, took much notice.

Child labour exploitation would eventually rise higher up the political agenda and, in 1834, sweeps could not use children under the age of 14.

Eventually, the Climbing Boys' Act of 1868 outlawed it completely.

While many rejoiced, it did, however, spell the end for some well established traditions.

And it is just one of those which takes place in an explosion of colour and dance in Rochester next weekend.

Because the Sweeps Festival harks back to a time long gone, when May Day meant a rare day off for those engaged in cleaning chimneys.

And to celebrate a day where they did not have to work, they would sing and dance and take to the streets for a day-long party.

Once the Climbing Boys' Act was passed, however, it began to fade in Medway, and by the early 1900s it finished completely.

However, in 1981 the event was revived – designed to reflect a key date in the area's history and to highlight an unusual celebration for an unlikely profession.

It is expected some 60,000 will head to Rochester to watch the festivities as they take place

over the long weekend of May 3-5.

As a consequence, it has become one of the largest May Day celebrations in the country.

The event is defined by more than 60 groups of Morris dancers who flock to keep the crowds entertained.

A spokesman for the event explains: "The festival was revived in 1981 by local businessman Gordon Newton, a keen historian.

"He decided it was time to bring it back and over the years he has helped develop the festival into what it is today – an extravaganza of traditional Britain.

"The modern day Sweeps Festival is a colourful mix of music, dancing and entertainment with more than 60 Morris sides and entertainers celebrating throughout the three days."

At the heart of the new event is something which harks back again to the event's 18th century roots.

The unusual Jack-in-the-Green ceremony sees a seven-foot character, usually dressed in an outfit which resembles a mini tree and covered in foliage, appear.

It is traditionally 'awoken' at dawn on Blue Bell Hill, Chatham, before walking with the sweeps on their parade through Rochester.

It was once a regular sight during May Day celebrations in the 16th and 17th century.

Where once people would wear garlands, it eventually led to people being covered, head to toe, in greenery and becoming known as Jack-in-the-Green.

For reasons lost in the mists of time, the figure became particularly associated with chimney sweeps.

It faded out, however, in the 19th century.

But it has returned, and it owes Kent for its revival. In 1976, organisers of the May Day celebrations in Whitstable reinstated the Jack-in-the-Green to lead the procession.

And, a few years later, when the Rochester Sweeps Festival returned, it joined in the occasion too.

A spokesman for Medway Council explained: "The tradition goes back 400 years to the chimney sweeps' traditional holiday. Jack would walk with the sweeps in the parade, which would continue with a procession through the streets of Rochester.

"Rochester's Sweeps Festival is the largest May Day celebration of its kind in the country, bringing together street entertainers, local chimney sweeps and fantastic live music in a riot of colour, dancing and revelry. The festival is also generally regarded as the largest gathering of Morris dancers in the world."



FUN FAIR: The Sweeps Festival in Rochester is now a hugely popular three-day extravaganza of traditional Britain



JACK-IN-THE-GREEN SET FOR DAWN WAKE UP

THE May Day celebrations begin at dawn – 5.30am – on Blue Bell Hill in Chatham with the waking of the Jack-in-the-Green.

The Mayor of Medway, Josie Iles, will officially launch the festival at 10.45am on Saturday, May 3, before which, local witches will cleanse the festival opening site at the Guildhall Museum forecourt in preparation for the weekend's events.

Once they've worked their magic, the musical entertainment will begin including headline act, Fairport Convention, performing at the Central Theatre on May 3.

Live music will also be per-

formed aboard the Edith May barge, moored at Rochester Pier across the three days.

New for 2014, street performances will take place on the Old Post Office stage in Star Lane, Rochester, as well as in the Crown freehouse, on May 3-4.

Also for the first time, a free folk concert will be held at the King's School from 3pm to 5pm on Sweeps' Sunday.

The much-loved fun fair will return to Rochester Castle gardens for the duration of the festival and there will even be a chance to discover what the future holds at the mini psychic fair.

Medway Council's portfolio holder for community services, Howard Doe, said: "The Rochester Sweeps Festival continues to go from strength to strength and is loved by both local people and those further afield.

"There's entertainment on every street corner and fantastic live performances from some of the best folk acts in the country.

"This year's witch cleansing is certainly going to kick things off with a difference, and the multitude of musical performances, fun fair rides, food and drink, really will make for a great bank holiday weekend."

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SMILES OF FUN: Chris Jordan appreciates the important part that pantomime can play in introducing young people to the many delights of theatre

New company is taking on a Central role over winter

It is difficult to overstate the importance of pantomime to provincial theatre. Without the jolly winter romp and the cash that it brings, it is likely that the curtain would come down for good on some of our best-loved smaller venues.

The decision as to which company will be presenting your annual pantomime is not one to be taken lightly.

It's one, though, that Medway Council had to take when seeking a replacement for Evolution Productions, Paul Hendy and Emily Wood's company based in east Kent, which decided not to continue at Chatham's Central Theatre this year.

In the event, the vote went to Jordan Productions, an Eastbourne company that was formed in 1993 and has since established a strong reputation in pantomime as well as other forms of theatre.

Names to have worked with the company include Bonnie Langford, Letitia Dean, Todd Carty, Stephen Mulhern and Bernie Nolan, while many people across the country will be familiar with its production Gotta Sing Gotta Dance, which has toured the UK five times.

So the demanding audiences of Medway need have no fears about the quality of Aladdin, which will be taking to the stage on Thursday, December 11, and rolling through 38 performances to Sunday, January 4, next year.

Chris Jordan, the managing director of Jordan Productions, is

The good folk of Medway will have a new production company presenting their pantomime later this year. Its managing director Chris Jordan tells **David Mairs** what they can expect.

promising something out of the ordinary.

"I know I would say this, but Aladdin is probably my favourite pantomime," he said. "There's real adventure involved and we've got a genie probably unlike any you've seen anywhere else – there's also a spectacular magic carpet."

So happy days for one and all, but how did the new relationship between Jordan Productions and Medway come to pass?

"We were approached by the venue back in September and asked to put a proposal together," said Jordan.

"We're based down in Eastbourne and we've been doing it 20 years now, would you believe? I've been very aware of the Chatham panto for a long time – it's always been a very happy and strong production.

"I think what's so important to me is that pantomime is often children's first experience of theatre. Indeed, it's often families' only experience of theatre – it's something you can't get on the Xbox or on the telly."

And what can those families expect?

"We like to make sure our shows are very lively, dynamic and interactive – that way, audiences may come back for other theatrical events. It's good that panto does seem to be building in popularity again and appears to be as strong as it ever was."

Jordan Productions will be putting on pantomime at seven

“Because there is so much room, the audience is very close to you and there's lots of interaction”

venues around the country – King's Lynn, Fareham and Redditch are among the others – and Jordan says the addition of the Chatham gig is welcome as it's relatively close to home.

"Each title is tailor-made for the venue," he said. "Especially at a venue like Chatham, which has quite an exciting space and

opportunities that you don't get elsewhere.

"The set design will be slightly different, with things built in the area in front of the proscenium arch. Because there is so much room, the audience is very close to you and there's lots of opportunity for interaction. People get to feel really involved – the dress circle is over the stage at some points.

"Every one of our titles changes every year – you have to make the most of the way your casting goes."

Depending on the approach, panto can be as much for the parents in the audience as it is for the children.

Often, that entails a little bit of naughtiness and, whisper it ever so quietly, sexual innuendo. Some like it, while some don't and find it inappropriate. What is Jordan's take?

"First and foremost is the story, whatever level you're talking about. The story is king – we specialise in having top West End people with top-level singing and dancing and special effects.

"It also works on another, more sophisticated, level and there's a little innuendo – I don't see anything wrong with that.

"We're just really pleased to be doing it. I know the venue well – it's at the heart of the community – and we're looking forward to taking it to the next level."

■ **Tickets for Aladdin are on sale now from The Central Theatre box office on 01634 338338 and at www.medwayticketslive.co.uk.**

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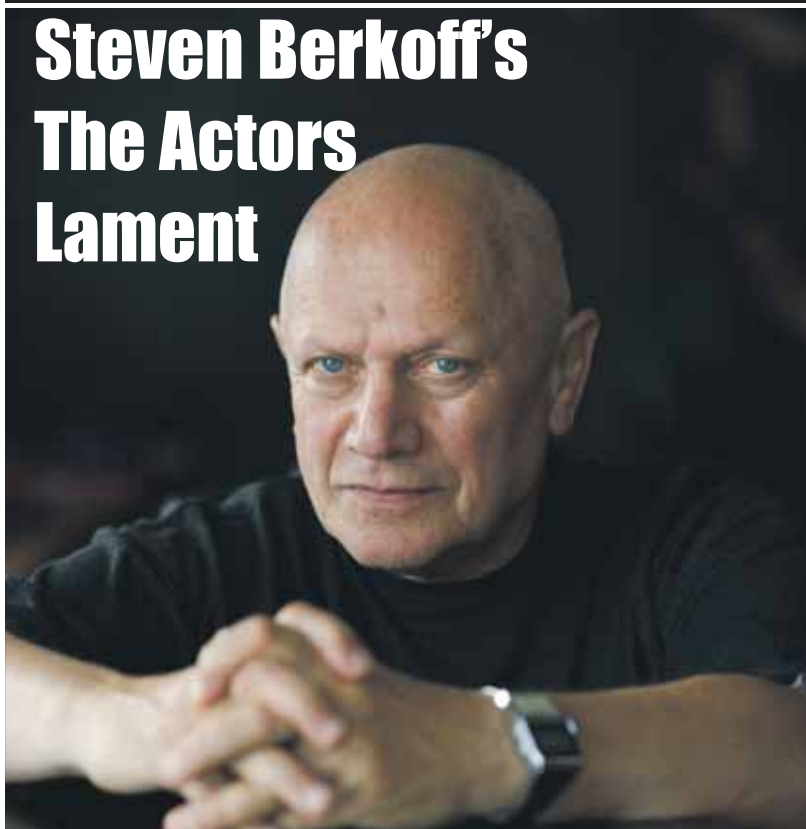
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Welcome to Ruby's sane new world

SHE'S so brash, so loud and so in your face that, to many people, Ruby Wax couldn't possibly be British. She is just so very American.

And those people would be right, but only partially. For Wax (born Ruby Wachs) is sort of one of us – born in Illinois, she has spent much of her life this side of the pond as a naturalised Brit.

That much is understood far and wide, but what is perhaps less known is that Wax has both suffered depression and has a Master's degree in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy.

Much more, then, to this celeb who rose to stardom by interviewing other celebs and is, it has to be said, far from everyone's cup of tea.

And now she brings some of the knowledge gained through her studies, together with her experience of having been some 61 years on this planet, to bear in a book called *Sane New World*.

That was never going to be enough for Wax, who has remodelled the book into a stage production of the same name and which she brings to The Orchard Theatre in Dartford next month.

Speaking to her as she prepared for her eight-date tour, I asked if we were in fact all mad – it seemed as good a starting point as any.

She replied that no we're not, which may be good or bad news, before revealing what *Sane New World* is all about, and what it's not.

"It's not about depression. I call it a manual for the 21st century. There's a

The comedy star with a degree in cognitive therapy gets all cerebral with **Dave Mairs**

plague of greeting each other – it's all so busy, busy, busy and so bred into our lives we don't even know we're doing it."

So is the show about mental health? Indeed is mental health a subject for stage jollity?

"It's about how your brain works – you have to take a subject and make it funny. I give you a tour of how your brain works."

"It's funny how our chemicals push us to different things. I call it bathrooms of grandeur – you can tell so much about people by their bathrooms."

"You'll see such elaborate tiles in someone's bathroom, for example. Do they need them, or are they just something they've seen in a magazine? It's another addiction."

"In the past, people knew their lot, but today there's constant unhappiness."

"We are killing ourselves with the way we think. I think it will kill many of us by 2020 – most of us will die from the immune system breaking down, which happens when you have more and more cortisone and adrenaline racing through you. It makes you less resistant."

If it all sounds a bit bleak, that's the wrong impression. In fact, Wax is saying it doesn't have to be that way.

"The show is hilarious!" she says in that way of hers. "People stand up and applaud at the end, which is

always a pretty good sign."

"The message is that the brain is malleable and you have to take over the wheel. We are not hard-wired – the brain is changeable. It's neural plasticity."

A fundamental tenet of her approach is mindfulness, a form of meditation that entails focusing on the present and taming "that bucking bronco of a mind".

Her life, it would seem, has improved immeasurably through her studies and her approach to tackling the 21st-century curse of stress, even if it won't keep the depression at bay forever.

"It isn't curable – it will come back," she said. "Depression is a disease, like Alzheimer's and can come from nothing. It doesn't depend on circumstances."

Such a stoic acceptance of her condition is no more than we would expect from Ruby Wax, but the manner in which she is taking on the greater challenge of the mind in its entirety should win admiration even from those who haven't always loved the American Briton.

She's a lot calmer now and, perhaps, so can you be.

■ Ruby Wax brings *Sane New World* to The Orchard Theatre, Dartford, on Sunday, May 4. Tickets are priced from £18 (a £1.50 per-ticket booking fee applies). Phone 01322 220000 or visit orchardtheatre.co.uk.



TAKE CHARGE: For Ruby Wax, the brain is central to new show

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t: 0844 683 1618 w: www.gurkhapalace.co.uk
Location 97 Enbrook Valley (Golden Valley Shopping Centre), Folkestone, CT20 3NE



Hospice beneficiary from park's explosion of colour

Heritage garden open one day only for charity fund-raiser

THE garden at Sandling Park, near Hythe, is to be opened for one day only to raise money for the Pilgrims Hospice. The Grade II heritage garden, which was part of the medieval forest of Westenhangar, is a collection of flora and fauna built up by the Hardy family for more than 100 years. Set in 25 acres, it offers a spectacular showing of rhododendrons, camellias, magnolias (more than 200 varieties), primulas and wild flowers. The azaleas collection is considered one of the finest in the country.

Jane Hardy said: "Due to mild weather conditions so far this year, the garden has exploded into bloom and colour – it should be in peak condition on the open day. Fingers crossed!" You can walk around the rose garden with tree peonies and viburnums, and if you're a tree-lover, then look no farther as you will find 20 national champion trees. All are rare and, most importantly, you can enjoy the display of more than 200 wild-sourced trees, most still bearing their collector's number. The garden open day will be held on Sunday, May 11, from 10am-5pm.

There is free parking and the cost to enter the garden will be £4 for adults and free for children. Dogs are not allowed and the woodland garden is unsuitable for wheelchair access. There will be an opportunity to buy tea, coffee and homemade cakes, all served with a smile by Operation Sunshine volunteers. You can also try your luck on the raffle run by volunteers from the Pilgrims Hospice, to which all proceeds will go. ■ The garden is at Sandling Park, Sandling, Hythe CT21 4HN.



COLOURFUL: Jane Hardy says Sandling Park should be in peak condition

In Aid of The Lord Whisky Sanctuary Fund
Registered Charity: 283483
Park House, Stelling Minnis, Canterbury, Kent CT4 6AN
Tel: 01303 862622 Fax: 01303 863007
Email: lord.whisky@btinternet.com - www.lordwhisky.co.uk

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How to find us: take the B2028 (Stone Street) and turn at the Jet Garage. At the end of the road you will see a large white building in front of you (The Lord Whisky Centre). Turn left and the sanctuary is approx. 600 yards on the right.

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Award-winning parks offering passport to see nature's greatest beasts up close and personal

TREAT the family to a wild adventure this May Bank Holiday weekend.

Come and see the largest collection of western lowland gorillas in the world and the largest herd of African elephants in the UK, plus lions, tigers, giant anteaters, monkeys and many more, all at the multi-award-winning Howletts Wild Animal Park just outside Canterbury.

Walk with lemurs and get up close and personal by coming face-to-face with some of the amazing animals in their glass-fronted enclosures.

Feeling adventurous? Then try out the Treetop Challenge* or Animal Adventure Challenge*.

Or jump on board Kent's only

safari at Port Lympne this May Bank Holiday weekend.

Take a ride on the wild side and embark on a great family adventure.

Port Lympne is one of the largest wild animal parks in the UK and home to more than 700 rare and endangered animals, including western lowland gorillas, the largest herd of black rhino in the UK, big cats, small cats, primates and more.

Ride the safari truck and encounter the UK's original and authentic African Experience, 100 acres where more than 200 wild animals, including giraffe, black rhino, ostrich and zebra can be seen roaming freely as if on the plains of Africa.

The park is also world-renowned for its successful breeding programmes and commitment to conservation.

Get your 'passport' to either Howletts or Port Lympne – pay once and visit all year for free!

The passport is amazing value at £23.95 for adults and £19.95 for children**. Alternatively, the Gold Card gives you unlimited entry to both parks for a whole year. The Gold Card is cheaper than two separate passports at £44.95 for adults and £34.95 for children.**

* Additional charges apply

** Terms and conditions apply; please see website for details



Special events for all to celebrate church's 150 years of worship

St George's Church in Bickley is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. Built in 1864 by local landowner George Wythes, the church is of Victorian Gothic style. The original spire was found to be unsafe in 1904 and replaced by a slightly shorter one soon after.

Hit during the Second World War, in 1989 it was severely damaged by fire, taking almost two years before it was restored, reopening in 1991.

St George's is in the Catholic tradition of the Church of England, with the Mass having been celebrated daily since the early 1930s.

Music plays a large part in parish worship under distinguished director of music Stephen Davies and a very competent choir.

To celebrate the 150th anniversary this year a number of special events have taken place and more are planned.

A jazz evening was held in February and a

performance of the St Matthew Passion by Charles Wood was performed by the church's choir during Lent.

This Sunday, St George's Day will be the church's main celebration of the year and also Father Owen's last service.

On Saturday, May 17, Aspects of Opera will perform a selection of light opera and songs from shows, while further events are planned for the remainder of the year.

St George's is also privileged to have four bishops attending its special services this year.

The church's own bishop, the Bishop of Fulham, was present at all services from Maundy Thursday to Easter Day.

The Bishop of Chichester will attend the St George's Day Mass, The Bishop of Rochester Festal Evensong on Sunday, July 6, and Bishop Martyn Jarrett the Dedication Service on Sunday, July 20.

FREE microchipping for your dog from Dogs Trust...at a vet near you!

Microchipping helps identify your dog if lost or stolen and it will soon be a legal obligation for all dogs to be chipped* — so don't miss out.

Call: 0330 123 0334 or visit www.chipmydog.org.uk for your nearest participating vet.



*By March 2015 in Wales and April 2016 in England

Registered Charity Number: 227523



History combines with fine food at quaint village pub

THE Red Lion at Hernhill is a picturesque 14th-century pub in a small village near Faversham.

Steeped in history, the pub dates back to the 1300s and still has many original features.

It offers a selection of traditional English food alongside frequently-changing seasonal specials.

Facilities include an upstairs restaurant, available for dining or

large functions, a front patio overlooking the church and village green and a well-established pub garden with many historical features and a large play area for children.

■ **The Red Lion is at Church Hill, Hernhill, near Faversham ME13 9JR. Phone 01227 751207, visit www.theredlion.org or email enquiries@theredlion.org.**

Transport your family back in time with a visit to Maidstone Museum

MAKE the most out of the May bank holidays by visiting Maidstone Museum and the Tyrwhitt-Drake Museum of Carriages. Open every day of the bank holiday, there is plenty to see and do for all the family at the Museums of Maidstone.

At Maidstone Museum & Bently Art Gallery, you can learn about the history of the town, get dressed up in costume gallery, see the archaeological treasures of Kent and find the museum's mummy.

The early May bank holiday will also be one of your last chances to see the exhibition *A Ladybird Childhood*. This free exhibition, which finishes on Sunday, May 11, features original artworks from the well-loved Ladybird books series.

Over the Saturday and Sunday the Tyrwhitt-Drake entry to the Museum of Carriages will be free.

This museum offers an insight into the fascinating history of transport and is home to a unique collection of horse-drawn vehicles and transport curiosities.

The collection is housed in a magnificent 14th-century building, part of the medieval Archbishops' Palace complex.

There are lots more events to look forward to over May, including a Murder Mystery evening, a talk on fashion and a family sleepover!

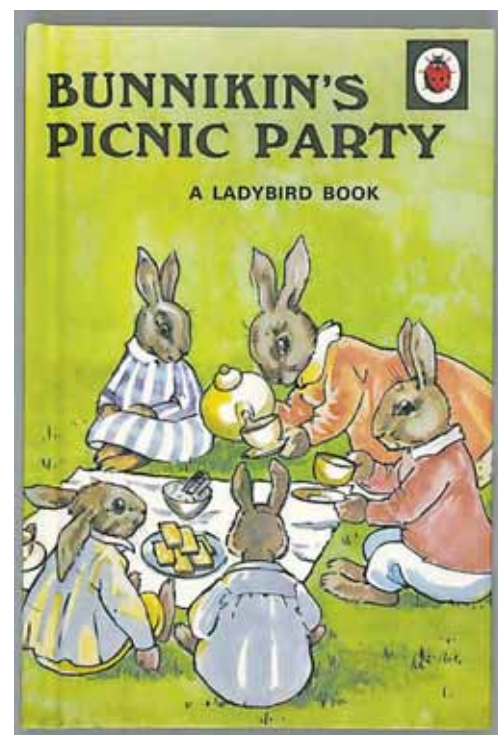
■ **Friday, May 16, Murder Mystery, 8pm-11pm, £30.**

■ **Saturday, May 24. All the rage: 1920s and 30s fashion, 11am to midday, £7/£5.**

■ **Friday, May 30, to 8am, Saturday, June 31. Into the Age of Glamour: Family Sleepover, 7pm. £30/£25.**

■ **Opening Times: Monday-Saturday, 10am-5pm, Sundays and bank holidays, midday to 4pm.**

You can phone 01622 602838 for more details.



Sittingbourne's Steam Railway

Star of the children's books, Jack the Station Cat, returns to team up with the Railway's Edward Bear for a bit of bank holiday fun (4-5th May) at Much Purring aka Kemsley Down! Join in the mouse hunt to win a prize. Trains depart Sittingbourne Viaduct hourly 11am-4pm



Fares: £6 for adults, £3 for children (3-13), £4 for concessions and £17 for families (2 adults and 4 children), other fares available
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A Night of Mystery

Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery

8pm, Friday 16th May

Take part in the Museums at Night celebration at Maidstone Museum with a preview of 'The Age of Glamour'. Venture back into the 1920s and enjoy an evening of unusual entertainment, become a detective for the night and uncover the secrets of this historic building.

£30 per person, price includes your first drink. Licensed cash bar will be open.

Advanced booking essential: 01622 602838 museuminfo@maidstone.gov.uk

MUSEUM OPENING TIMES:

Monday to Saturday 10:00 - 17:00

Sunday & Bank Holidays 12:00 - 16:00

@MaidstoneMuseum

www.museum.maidstone.gov.uk



**Museums
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Red Lion

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01227 751207
www.theredlion.org

LOCATED on the cliff-top overlooking Kingsgate Bay, The Captain Digby provides some of the most stunning coastal views in Kent.

This really is the ideal venue for the whole family this bank holiday weekend, boasting indoor and outdoor children's play areas, a cosy traditional bar and ample seating in the large restaurant area.

If the bank holiday sunshine shows its face, then enjoy your food or drinks right on the cliff-top in the outside seating area and take in the views and enjoy the bank holiday in style.

Literally a stone's throw from the beach, why not make a day of it, enjoy the long weekend and sit back and enjoy the freshly-prepared home-cooked food and vast range of beers and wines available?

The two large play areas will keep the kids entertained for hours while you sample some light bites, the ever-popular traditional fish and chips, or, if you are really hungry, the Shipmates Double Burger!

With a separate extensive menu for the kids, The Captain Digby really does provide something for everyone and is a must-visit this bank holiday weekend. Booking is advisable on 01843 867764, or, if you're in a rush, book online at www.captaindigby.co.uk.

Future events

Next bank holiday, Monday, May 26: Superheroes & Princesses Day... children's entertainment all day, including games and dancing. Prizes for kids in fancy-dress.

Just be sure to book your place at Captain Digby's coastal table



You're in good hands when you're learning with Angela

ANGELA'S Swim School encourages people of all ages and abilities to learn to swim to a high standard.

Angela's career as an international swimmer is what inspired her unique style of teaching.

Through the years she has taught more than 3,000 children and adults to swim, enjoying introducing them to this health-giving sport.

Angela's Swim School is proud to

be a part of the Amateur Swimming Association and is offering a free taster session at all its new locations: Skeet Hill, Orpington; Mecure Maidstone; and King's School Rochester.

Contact the school to book. Spaces are limited and quote 'Splash and Splash' when booking.

Visit www.anglasswimschool.co.uk to find out more.



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Bank Holiday fun at the Captain Digby

Located on the cliff top overlooking Kingsgate Bay, is the Captain Digby restaurant and pub. Our award winning restaurant is perfect for couples and families alike and is one of Thanet's most popular places to dine all year round.

*Choose from our delicious menu
and our varied choice of wines*

Loads of activities to keep the kids happy including our indoor and outdoor play area and face painting on the weekend.

Additional fun with loads of extras to do during the school breaks which will keep the kids occupied.

Book your table on line now to avoid disappointment.



The Captain Digby Kingsgate
Broadstairs, CT10 3QH

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www.captaindigby.co.uk

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Cheer on our kings of speedway

THE Kent CTA Fire Kings Speedway team are based at the Central Park Stadium [home of Sittingbourne Greyhound Racing] and ride in the National League.

This May Bank Holiday Monday the Kings go into action in their first home league match of the season versus one of their principal challengers for the title, the Mildenhall Fen Tigers.

Mildenhall were league champions in 2012 and cup finalists last season.

This is the second season of speedway racing at Central Park and the reintroduction of the sport to the county – where back in the 1980s teams from Crayford and Canterbury were very popular – has proved a major success.

The National League meetings comprise 15 heats of high-octane action as four riders in

each race, mounted on 500cc motorbikes with fixed gears and no brakes, battle for points around the 268 metres of dirt track.

With unparalleled views from the main grandstand and a unique atmosphere served up by the enthusiastic CTA Fire Kings' supporters, speedway racing at Central Park offers an excellent bank holiday day out for families.

Action on Monday, May 5, starts at 3pm (gates open from 1.30pm).

The CTA Fire Kings then race at Central Park every Monday with a 6.30pm start time, competing in speedway's National League – a division containing clubs from the length and breadth of the UK: from Plymouth to Buxton, from Stoke to King's Lynn.

■ **Details of fixtures and all the latest news are available at the Kent speedway website www.kentkings.co.**

Royal Engineers' distinguished history laid bare for all to see

THE Royal Engineers Museum, Library and Archive holds a vast collection of more than one million objects covering the long and varied history of the Corps of Royal Engineers.

There is something for all the family in Kent's only designated museum.

Twenty-five galleries house exhibits of international importance telling the story of Britain's fascinating and explosive military history from the 1700s, as well as the more local history of the Medway area, with which the Royal Engineers have been involved since the time of William the Conqueror.

See Wellington's map from The Battle of Waterloo in the French Wars gallery, or experience the interactive First World War trench.

Discover Zulu artefacts, a magnificent

display of medals, a V2 rocket and a Harrier jump-jet along with other military vehicles.

The museum is situated in the heart of the historic Medway towns.

Access to the Royal Engineers Museum, Library and Archive is easy, whether you're visiting by car, foot or public transport.

For more information, visit re-museum.co.uk or phone 01634 822839.

■ Facilities

Wheelchair access, free car-parking, large print guides, baby-changing, toilet facilities, museum shop and Courtyard Café.

■ Opening times

Tuesday to Friday 9am-5pm (last entry 4pm).

Please note the museum is closed on Mondays.

Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday

Mondays 11.30am-5pm (last entry 4pm).



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Make friends with our cuddly lambs and savour the joys of Spring at Mount Ephraim this Bank Holiday Weekend. Enjoy story-telling of well-loved children's tales plus crafts and face-painting. A great day out for all the family!

Pat-a-Lamb Weekend - Sunday 4th and Monday 5th May, 11am until 5pm

OPEN 6TH APRIL - 30TH SEPTEMBER Wed to Sun 11 - 5pm.
£6 adults and £2.50 children. Group rate £5 per adult (10+).

SEASONAL EVENTS – see our website for details.
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www.mountephraimgardens.co.uk
01227 751496
info@mountephraimgardens.co.uk

Kent CTA Kings SPEEDWAY

SPEEDWAY MEETING
BANK HOLIDAY MONDAY MAY 5TH

- ADULTS: £12
- TEENS UP TO / INCLUDING 17YRS: £5
- 12 YEARS AND UNDER FREE *must be accompanied by an adult*

3PM START with Kent CTA Fire Kings vs Mildenhall

ST GEORGE'S CHURCH, BICKLEY CELEBRATING 150 YEARS

This year is the 150th anniversary of the opening of St George's Church in Bickley. The church, a Grade II Listed building, was built by the local land owner, George Wythes, in Victorian Gothic style. To celebrate this anniversary a number of special events are planned for this year.

April

Sunday 27th, 5pm – St George's Day. Patronal Festival Sung Mass led by the Bishop of Chichester followed by a party. This will also be Father Owen Higgs last service as Parish Priest.

May

Saturday 17th, 7.30 pm in church – 'Aspects of Opera' a small local group of professional singers, will perform music from popular operas and songs from the shows. In partnership with the Rotary Club of Bromley-Bickley. Tickets £10 in advance (Margaret Brading – 07793 402459) or on the door.

June

Saturday 14th, 1pm to 4 pm, in the church grounds – Parish Fete

Saturday 28th, 7.30 pm, in the church hall - Murder Mystery Evening performed by the Imperial Players of Chislehurst.

July

Sunday 6th, 6.30 pm – Festal Evensong with the Bishop of Rochester.

Sunday 20th, 10.30 am – Sung Mass in Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Dedication of the Church led by Bishop Martyn Jarrett, followed by a party.

September

Sunday 21st, 6 pm in church – Harvest Songs of Praise followed by Harvest Supper in the hall.





Kent's only safari!

Take a ride on the wild side and embark on a great family adventure this **May Bank Holiday Weekend.**

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We are delighted to be able to bring you the 2014 Kent Life and Kent on Sunday Food & Drink Awards

YOUR votes are being encouraged for the 2014 Kent Life and Kent on Sunday Food & Drink Awards. The awards dinner will take place at Tudor Park Marriott Hotel and Country Park, Bearsted, near Maidstone, on November 13, 2014, from 6.30pm to midnight.

The prestigious awards, which launched in 2013, are designed to champion, highlight and offer a showcase to Kent's outstanding food and drink industry.

From local producers and suppliers to small farming businesses, restaurants, chefs, pubs and hoteliers, all will be people who care about the countryside and the future of our local environment.

The companies featured will be nominated by you, our wonderful Kent Life and Kent on Sunday readers.

We want to know if you've received a fantastic meal at your local pub or been impressed by the produce and service at your local farmers' market or farm shop.

The nomination form is available in print form within both Kent on Sunday and Kent Life if you prefer to vote by post, available to complete or download online at www.kent-life.co.uk and at www.kentnews.co.uk, or you can email us at kentfda@archant.co.uk.

Entries close on August 1, 2014. Our hand-picked panel of high-profile judges, who all live and work in Kent, then select a short-list.

This kickstarts the independent judging process, when all the finalists will be visited or interviewed to determine a worthy winner in each of the 12 categories.

All finalists will be invited to the awards ceremony in November, when they will enjoy a fabulous reception and three-course meal prepared by Tudor Park's talented head chef

Tom Biddle before finding out if they are a winner.

This is our second Kent Life and Kent on Sunday Food & Drink Awards and we are immensely proud to be able to offer you once again the opportunity to reward and recognise the deserving businesses within our local food and drink industry that go above and beyond expectations.

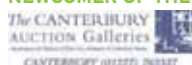
These awards are what you, our readers, make of them, so if you are the owner of a pub or restaurant, a chef or local producer, then spread the word among your clients, customers and visitors.

It takes no time at all to cast your vote. You can email or post your nominees. The judging panel is looking for quality over quantity, focusing on good comments rather than simply the number of votes, so that everybody is in with a chance, no matter how big or small their business.

Don't forget to let us know on our Twitter pages @kentlife and @KOSMedia when you have made your vote, by using #kentfda - similarly, if you are looking for nominations, please use this hashtag.



NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR



This popular category is open to anyone in the food or drink industry who has started a new venture within the last 18 months. We want to know what impact they have made on the local community and if they have started to achieve any success further afield. Are they helping to promote Kent food and drink to a new audience or have they found a new way to promote an old favourite?

BUTCHER OF THE YEAR



This is your chance to praise your local butcher and everything they do. Consider asking your butcher how their meat is hung, prepared and cut and whether it can be traced to a local farm. Are the staff knowledgeable and helpful? Do they suggest new cuts for you to try? Do they use their expertise to prepare meat ready for the oven? Does your butcher play a key role within the local community? If so, nominate them!

TEA SHOP OF THE YEAR



Tea shops are an integral part of the Kent food and drink scene and we'd like to know your favourites. Who makes the best tea, serves the nicest cakes and the freshest scones? Is the jam homemade and are the sandwiches freshly cut and liberally filled? Do they make tea feel like a special event? Most importantly, are most of the ingredients locally sourced? We're looking forward to hearing all about your favourites.

FOOD PRODUCER OF THE YEAR



New this year, this category celebrates our local food producers. We are looking for someone who consistently provides both top-quality local produce and service to their customers. We are keen to hear of any innovations, so if they're doing something new, we'd like you to share it with us. If your local baker, grocer or farmer delights, let us know.

DRINK PRODUCER OF THE YEAR



New this year, this category celebrates our local drink producers. Whether it's gorgeous Kentish fizz or delicious juice, we want to find the producers who play such a vital role in the county's food and drink economy. We want to know who you think makes the best drink in Kent, alcoholic or not, and why it is so special. We are keen to hear of any innovations, so if they're doing something new, for example a fabulous new flavour, we'd like to hear about it.

FARM SHOP OF THE YEAR



A good farm shop needs to have that extra-special something to tempt shoppers away from their local supermarket. Are the staff friendly and knowledgeable? Is the range of produce and the layout of an excellent standard? Does your local farm shop offer a box scheme? Is most of the produce sold there grown or raised on that farm or nearby, and if not would the owner be able to tell you where it is from? Nominate your favourite now!

FARMERS' MARKET OF THE YEAR



The key to a good farmers' market is not only the range of produce and the quality of its stalls but also the principles that it supports - for example, does it work as a co-operative with other farmers? Is most of the produce sold there

AWARDS CRITERIA

grown or raised locally? Are the stallholders welcoming and knowledgeable? Is the layout easy to navigate as you move around the market? Are any extras offered on a regular basis, such as cookery demonstrations or talks? Is the market well advertised so you can plan your visit in advance and is there good accessibility and parking? Let us know so we can tell everyone about the best place to go.

PUB OF THE YEAR



A good pub these days has to offer more than a warm welcome and excellent ale. We are looking for an inn that also offers delicious and locally-sourced food with seasonal variations. As well as excellent food and drink, it must offer fantastic friendly customer service and real value for money. Good pubs are genuinely the hub of their local community. To misquote a popular TV programme, "pubs are all about ambience, ambience, ambience". If you know a great one, even if it isn't your local, let us all know by voting for them.

RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR



The Kent Life and Kent on Sunday Restaurant of the Year needs to offer an incomparable dining experience, from the ambience to the service and, most importantly, the food. Are the ingredients locally sourced, do they support local producers and, if so, are they recognised on the menu? Look through their wine list - do they have local as well as international wines and fizz and can the staff tell you more if you ask? We'd expect nothing less from the 2014 Restaurant of the Year.

CHEF OF THE YEAR



Kent is blessed with outstanding chefs working in the county's fantastic array of restaurants. The Chef of the Year should be someone who has devoted himself or herself to the cause of serving the best possible food. They will demonstrate technical ability, use of seasonal ingredients, presentation of the food and an understanding of how flavours work together. They will be able to lead and inspire their team and to talk to customers knowledgeably about the dishes they have enjoyed. Above all, we are looking for passion - that magic ingredient that defines true greatness in the kitchen.

CUSTOMER SERVICE OF THE YEAR



Another category that's new this year is Customer Service of the Year. Most of our awards recognise customer service in some form. This category celebrates this vital element for its own sake. Do you know an individual, organisation or establishment offering consistently excellent service that goes above and beyond what you expect? We all know great service when we have received it - now is your chance to get it recognised. If you know a person, company, producer, pub, shop or restaurant that is a delight to deal with, tell us.

KENT FOOD & DRINK HERO OF THE YEAR



Kent has a food and drink scene that is among the most vibrant in the UK, as you would expect from the Garden of England. This category celebrates the individual who has made a positive impact on the food or drink community - someone who goes the extra mile to promote Kent to a wider audience and is passionate about local produce throughout. Now is your chance to nominate your own Kent Food and Drink Hero.



Kent Life and Kent on Sunday Food & Drink Awards 2014 Nomination Form

Nominate your Kent food and drink favourites by using this form, or email us at kentfda@archant.co.uk

Please post your entry form to:
Food & Drink Awards 2014,
Archant KOS Media,
Apple Barn, Hythe Road, Smeeth,
Ashford TN25 6SS

Or you can email us at:
kentfda@archant.co.uk

Copies of the form and posters to
advertise your entry are available at
www.kent-life.co.uk and at
www.kentnews.co.uk.

The closing date for entries is
Friday, August 1, 2014.

Name

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By entering your details you will be automatically added to the Archant database. Archant will contact you with relevant offers and you can unsubscribe from this at any time. If you would prefer not to be contacted, please state 'no offers' on this form.



■ Our 2013 Kent Food and Drink Hero, Stephanie Hayman, above, who has revolutionised school meals in east Kent. Who will be your choice of Hero for the 2014 top award?

Kent Food & Drink Hero of the Year

Sponsored by Canterbury Auction Galleries

Who?

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Food Producer of the Year

Sponsored by Perrys Chartered Accountants

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Farmers' Market of the Year

Sponsored by MyFerryLink

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Chef of the Year

Sponsored by Britelite

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Butcher of the Year

Sponsored by Bybrook Barn

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Drinks Producer of the Year

Sponsored by Anchor & Hope

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Pub of the Year

Sponsored by Eastwell Manor

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Customer Service of the Year

Sponsored by Fenwick Canterbury

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Tea Shop of the Year

Sponsored by Gerald Lukehurst

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Farm Shop of the Year

Sponsored by Winterdale Cheesemakers

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Restaurant of the Year

Sponsored by Rix & Kay

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Kent Food & Drink Hero of the Year

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Send us your views.

Write to:
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Email:
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Twitter:
@kosmedia

Please include your name and address, although these will be withheld in exceptional circumstances, and a daytime phone number for verification (this will not be published). We reserve the right to edit all letters.

An accident just waiting to happen

THE Bayham Road entrance to Lamberhurst is a road 'black-spot'.

The B2169 winds round after Hook Green then climbs to a left bend followed by a right bend, which hosts a traffic-calming buildout.

There is no room for buses or wide vehicles without them encroaching on the wrong side of the road.

This dangerous situation was recognised by Kent County Council and the Highways Agency tried to resolve matters by compulsory purchase of a strip of farmland to straighten the road.

Years passed, nothing happened, the farmer asked for his land back and it was returned.

The danger is compounded as today's residents are forced to park on the verge – restricted by a ditch on one side and a kerb on the other – with no protection from moving traffic while entering or exiting their vehicles.

Our unsafe roads are the responsibility of the Highways Agency and KCC, and local parishes are being ignored. These authorities should be pressured to take action – or ban all buses and wide vehicles until this danger is eliminated.

Edward La Coste, Lamberhurst

Pickle's planning lacks real thought

MIKE Eddy (Letters 13.04) is right to point out the destructive nature of the Government's planning policies.

The National Planning Framework (NPPF) effectively ties the hands of local planning authorities, like Dover district and Tunbridge Wells borough councils, by demanding permission is granted to virtually all development anywhere.

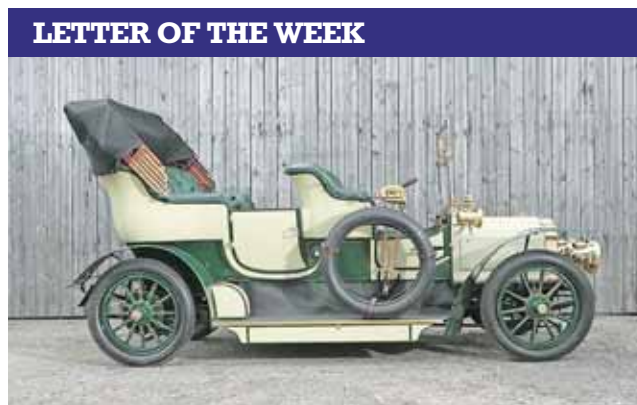
And if the local planning authorities, for sound reasons, do put up a fight on behalf of their residents, the developers go straight to appeal and costs are almost invariably awarded against the council.

The NPPF comes from a government that claimed it was in favour of local decisions being taken by local people; from a government that said it would be the greenest ever.

It is nothing of the kind. Decisions that directly affect the lives of families are being overridden roughshod while development is pushed through against the interests of local communities and the environment which they live.

Thanks to Eric Pickles, this is a very one-sided process.

If a planning committee (all local



LETTER OF THE WEEK

Vintage car auction is taking wrong road

I FELT concern when I read of the forthcoming auction of Michael Banfield's collection of vintage cars as one fears that highly interesting and rare vehicles could fall into the hands of overseas collectors (KoS last week).

As a nation we ought to have some way of safeguarding our transport heritage so as to make it less likely for this sort of thing to happen.

I am inclined to think the Banfield collection should have been made over to a special trust. I am sure this is what has happened with regard to, for example, the Montagu collection.

Your report mentions a 1922 double-deck bus valued at £110,000. This turns out to be a Tilling-Stevens (albeit with a replica body) that was in the Thomas Tilling fleet in London.

There is also a London General

S-type, also from 1922, with a similar price on it. Another bus in the collection is the well-known (but not seen for a good many years) ex-Jersey Motor Transport double-deck Leyland Titan TD2.

It would be a tragedy if any of these went to America or anywhere else abroad.

I hope that bodies such as the Historic Commercial Vehicle Society will be able to step in here.

Also the Tilling-Stevens factory was, of course, based in Maidstone, so it would be good if a photo of this surviving Tilling-Stevens could go on display in Wetherspoons in Maidstone, complementing the photo already there of a Maidstone and District vehicle with the caption saying it is a Tilling-Stevens although it is actually a Leyland (the first of many in the fleet).

John Humphrey, Sevenoaks

councillors) goes against its officers' recommendation, then Mr Pickles had said the appeal inspector should give costs against the council.

However, if a developer puts in an application against the NPPF and it is refused, then goes to appeal and loses again, the council has to put up a massive battle to get costs.

In the last six months, Dover District Council has lost almost £40,000; other councils have lost even more. And all because local councillors have tried to represent the people who elected them.

The Government talks about local decision-making but takes away the power to make those choices.

It really seems that Mr Pickles wants to see everything granted

One must wonder how long it will be before he brings in a law to surcharge any councillor who votes against an officer recommendation.

All this from a minister who was elected on a policy of 'localism'.

If Mr Pickles wants to help local councils, then he should give us powers to deal with the builders who are in the Dover council area sitting on a 'landbank' of more than 12,000 units of housing, all with planning permission but yet to be started.

Bill Gardner,

**Opposition planning spokesman,
Dover District Council**

Still not warming to solar farm idea

THE controversy over solar farms in open countryside rolls on.

Ashford Borough Council has refused planning applications for large-scale solar farms in Pluckley, Kenardington and Hothfield, but now Hothfield is in the frame again.

The proposal, which was rejected in December 2013, was for a solar farm covering 49 acres in fields close to the village of Hothfield; the same location is now the site of a revised plan for just over 23 acres.

In recent speeches, Greg Barker, minister of state for energy and climate change, has been emphasising solar farms should be on brownfield land or in industrial areas.

"Where solar farms are not on brownfield land," he said, "you must be looking at low-grade agricultural land." The land at Hothfield is not low-grade; it is of the grade described as "the best and most productive".

This was one of the reasons the previous application was refused.

Mr Barker has recommended placing solar panels on the roof-tops of homes, offices, factories, schools and supermarkets. With all the new building planned for Ashford, there should be plenty of those available.

National Planning Policy recommends plans should "take account of the different roles and character of different areas, recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and supporting thriving rural communities within it".

The land in question forms part of Hothfield Heathy Farmlands, a designated Landscape Character Area.

Mr Barker also emphasised that the views of local communities must be taken into account.

Already, objections from Hothfield residents and farther afield are flooding in to the ABC planning department's website, just as they did for the original application.

The developers appear to expect there will be fewer objections to a smaller site, but there is little doubt that, if the first application had been for 23 acres, the volume of objection would have been little different.

It is hard to see why, after three refusals, the developers hope that a fourth will be any more successful.

Let's be clear. Most objectors at Hothfield and elsewhere do not oppose solar farms *per se*. Far from it.

Most of the community actively support renewable-energy initiatives in the right place. The Hothfield solar farm proposal was wrong last time and is wrong this time.

Peter Patten, Hothfield

KOS 10 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

AS part of our commitment to providing the best service to you, we have produced our 10 guiding principles which tie in with our parent company Archant's overall mission statement.

Archant's mission statement is: "We bring together motivated buyers and sellers through the creation of unique and compelling content and community expertise." This is summed up in the strapline "Inspiring Communities".

The way KoS will create our unique and compelling content is to follow these 10 principles: **Kent on Sunday will:**

- 1) Be available in every postcode in Kent.
- 2) Be fair, accurate and balanced.
- 3) Be written in clear, concise English.
- 4) Not be overly sensational.
- 5) Have a sense of humour.
- 6) Have an easily understood division between

news, comment and advertising.

- 7) Seek to celebrate as well as constructively criticise.
- 8) Highlight topical issues of concern to people living in the county.
- 9) Spotlight individual cases which raise broader concerns.
- 10) Champion causes that it feels are important to the well-being of the county and its people.



Ripple Windmill

by **Thomas Webzell**
from Minster

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SUE optimistic divorced lady with OHAC, good job, enjoys meals out, cinema, countryside, pub lunches, looking for likeminded outgoing happy male. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410467

CHRISTINA, curvy beauty, 27yrs, own home, very very adventurous seeks no strings fun and frolics. Can accommodate and will answer all calls. Tel No: 0905 002 1957 Box 410127

CATHY very much a lady seeks gent up to 62yrs who would appreciate an independent professional sassy female who loves to be wined, dined and romanced. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410301

WOULD you like to bounce into Spring with me and onwards? Widow late 60's, enjoy most things in life, looking for someone to enjoy them with. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411395

SARAH, married lady seeks discreet no strings fun with gent. ACA. Tel No: 0905 002 1961 Box 408291

LADY 60, size 12, easy going, likes animals, seeks male for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411301

VANESSA 32yrs single mum, honest, loving, kind hearted, been hurt in the past enjoys music, reading etc. WLTW my very special Mr Right. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409899

LYN 34yrs, pretty petite dark haired female, loves music, meals out, quiet drinks out, seeking caring male with GSOH who can make me feel special again. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410137

CAROLINE blonde curvy very active lady who loves to socialise, countryside, seeking similar caring male for LTR and to share good times with. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410957

ANNA, busty mature lady seeks no strings discreet meetings with male any age or location. Tel No: 0905 002 1956 Box 366019

RACHEL 39, brown hair/eyes, 5ft 6ins, bubbly, outgoing, naughty, busty, divorced, seeks male for discreet fun times. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410835

SOPHIE 27yr old nursing assistant with no ties looking for discreet adult fun times with tall attractive guy 35-42yrs. GSOH essential. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410717

34YR single mum of 1 who loves nights out having a good time seeks similar sociable fun guy to enjoy relaxed but extremely fun relationship. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410709

BUSTY Caribbean lady who loves music, dance and singing, looking for nice older guy for mutual adult no strings fun times. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410305

SUSAN seeking nice male, medium build, 35, easygoing, likes music, nights in. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 406779

SAM, 35yrs, own business, sexy, loves dressing up and married, seeks discreet man for casual meetings. Can travel anywhere. ACA. Tel No: 0905 002 1949 Box 408297

MARIE 37yrs slim attractive caring, likes meals in/out, cinema, tennis, keeping fit/active, WLTW fun loving, reliable man for friendship leading to more. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411037

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SUSAN 29 green eyes, dark hair, slim, looking for Mr tall dark and handsome to take me out, enjoy adult times without complications just fun. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410957

KAREN blonde blue eyed slim 35yr old interesting female looking for good times, call me if you are in a similar situation, bored and looking for some fun. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410719

RACHAEL 36yr old nurse looking to raise the temperature of reliable sincere male. I have my OACH, a single mum to 1, love gym, cosy meals, animals etc. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411045

KATIE 21yr old very attractive female who is up for most things, looking for daytime fun, no strings and discreet pls. Age/status unimportant. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410573

JEWISH widow, 67, loves animals, seeks genuine, Jewish gent, 68-73 for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410547

DAWN 38 dark hair/eyed medium built busty female who loves nights in/out. WLTW fun honest male/single dad with GSOH to help mend my broken heart. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410483

TERRI 44 green eyed long legged busty blonde, loves to dress up and look feminine, seeking loving, fun, honest professional to fall head over her heels with. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410315

SUE attractive, likes walks, gardening, social drinks, looking for male to settle down with, 60's. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410231

68YR old widow, seeking 68-70yr old gent, likes meals out, cosy nights in, lets start New Year with new outlook. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409467

CATHY happy independent female looking for her soul mate, someone to spend quality time but who also likes their own space. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409909

MARIE slim attractive fun brunette, looking for good times with exciting broadminded male. Status unimportant. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409707

REBECCA kind, caring, honest, lonely, seeking older gent to wine and dine me. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 402273

59YR old Kent lady, bubbly, large build, dog lover, easygoing, GSOH, seeks male. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 403071

JANE pretty size 12, loves going out socialising, countryside, meals out, looking for no strings fun, nothing heavy, give me a call if you are seeking similar. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410579

SUE 32 blonde blue eyed curvy nurse, caring, loving romantic, faithful, likes cosy nights in with a nice wine and lovely man, if that's you, call me. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410571

WOULD you like to be my Valentine? Widow 68, seeking Valentine 68-70, likes most things, would like to share them with someone. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410695

BLONDE pretty, long legged, voluptuous, blue eyes, seeks male. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410585

LAURA happy size 12-14, attractive, loves shopping, gym, music, clubbing, eating in/out, looking for sincere honest male looking for more than just good fun. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410713

ANGIE 32 curvy size 16, very attractive, good company and really fun to be with. What are you waiting for? Call me. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409255

SARAH pretty petite green eyed female, lots of fun, likes children, animals, gym, eating out, running, sports, fast cars, shopping, seeking, nice guy to spend time with. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408879

BLONDE female, 5ft 1ins, size 12, likes meals out, drinks, nights in, seeks male. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409025

CLAIRE young 39 slim size 10, pretty, outgoing, seeks similar spontaneous male for nights in/out and fun times. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409417

SUE young at heart female, very adventurous and looking for no strings fun with mature man. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409251

JAN 38yr old attractive lonely female looking for uncomplicated fun times only. Status unimportant. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409107

Men Seeking

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DEREK seeking female, 50-60 for company, friendship and have fun together. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411433

MALE 49, attractive, fit, spontaneous, good company, no ties, seeking likeminded lady for the road ahead, nights in and out. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411309

RAY 63, 5ft 10ins, slim, semi-retired, seeking no strings discreet meets for adult fun. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411147

WORLD war veteran seeking happy lady with nice conversation in the Kent area. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411133

41YR old male, dark hair, 5ft 11ins, easy going, likes music, guitar, seeking female for friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410411

CHIPS on the pier, walks on the beach/countryside, VGSOH, 58yrs old, fit male, seeks female for laughs and love and whatever. NE Kent. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411725

MALE 71, 5ft 10ins, medium build, N/S, likes gardening, dogs, seeks female, 65-71 for friendship/companionship and outings. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411587

MALE 5ft 11ins, good-looking, athletic build, looking for discreet fun times. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411477

EARLY 50's single male, smoker, seeking likeminded female for company and to share life. Must have GSOH, like animals, walks, home made food and nights in. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410441

BROWN eyed white mature, handsome male, seeking black female, 18-50 for discreet no strings adult fun. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410377

STEVE 6ft 4ins, OHAC, seeking relationship, outdoor type, homey, wanting mutual good relationship with sexy woman. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 407835

PAUL own business, looking for daytime fun with lady. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 411127

DAVE 65, retired, N/S, likes gardening, music, meals out, holidays, seeks female. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410971

DAVE 62, 5ft 10ins, slim, semi-retired builder, seeks no strings discreet daytime meets for adult fun. Surrey. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410899

MALE likes outdoor life, smoker, seeking local female for cosy nights in. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410755

BRIAN 70, Maidstone, seeking female, 60 plus, likes meals out, cinema, theatre, days out and cosy nights in. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410611

DEREK 5ft 11ins, slim-medium build, loving, caring, seeking black lady for possible relationship. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410511

PHIL 6ft, clean shaven, blue eyes, smart, likes sports, walks, films, theatre, music, animals, GSOH, seeks female, 40-55 for fun and friendship, maybe more. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410351

SELSEA 43, driver, own home, N/S, 5ft 8ins, slim, dark hair, green eyes, confident, outgoing, likes most things, seeks N/S male, 40-48. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408405

SATURDAY night blues! Home alone again and looking for male companionship. Blonde, slim, 32yrs, attractive, what are you waiting for? Call me if you're normal and lovely. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408867

FLOR beautiful educated European blonde, articulate, seeking similar intelligent well-mannered mature gent to enjoy socialising, conversing and quality times. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408293

KAREN 55, fun loving, attractive, young at heart, seeks caring, affectionate man, 55-65 who loves animals and the simple things in life. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408813

PROFESSIONAL male, early 40's, fun loving, independent, OHAC, seeks warm, sincere, fun loving female for LTR. Animals/children welcome. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409745

RETIRED male, fit, active, seeks no strings discreet meet with female, any age and size. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410343

ADVENTUROUS male, mid 50's, seeks similar lady for fun and mutually enjoyable discreet relationship. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410339

CHRIS widower likes DIY, gardening, nights out, rock and roll, N/S, looking for LTR with female. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410191

ATTRACTIVE white gent, 48, 5ft 6ins, romantic, easy going, GSOH, seeking young lady, 60-75 for quality discreet fun times. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 410025

71YR old romantic, 6ft, likes life, socialising, reading, strong tea, dogs, smoker but house trained seeks mature lady needing TLC. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 407277

DAVE 50, likes holidays, meals out, socialising, easy going, seeks female 40 plus. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408541

ADAM 48, single dad, bored, seeking fun and more. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408421

DAVE 50, seeks female of similar age for meals out, holidays etc. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408415

MALE seeking attractive female for discreet fun times. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409533

TALL black male, 45, likes meals out, good company, romantic, GSOH, light hearted, seeks easy-going female. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 409621



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MALE 67, professional, fit, 5ft 10ins, medium build, reliable, taciturn, likes most things, seeks slim lady, let's go! Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 407855

ANTHONY 48, athletic, enjoys country walks, seeks youthful female for friendship/relationship. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 407355

71YR old romantic, 6ft, likes life, socialising, reading, strong tea, dogs, smoker but house trained seeks mature lady needing TLC. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 407277

DAVE 50, likes holidays, meals out, socialising, easy going, seeks female 40 plus. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408541

ADAM 48, single dad, bored, seeking fun and more. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408421

DAVE 50, seeks female of similar age for meals out, holidays etc. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408415

RETIRED male, seeks no strings discreet meets with slim-medium build female, any age for adult fun. Midway area. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 408343

RETIRED male, 66, 6ft 2ins, easy going, GSOH, loyal, loves pets, meals out, life, seeks lady for LTR. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 407317

TALL friendly, very light hearted, single 58, seeks pretty woman for LTR, mutual selection of activities and choosing how to spend our time. Croydon. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 407147

DOG lover short of British slim petite lady to maybe get into 1-2-1 relationship and start something new. Smoker welcome, age immaterial. Tunbridge Wells area. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 404417

TALL slim male, early 40's, seeks loving female, 29-39 to share the nice things in life. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 407065

PROFESSIONAL 45yr old male, one son, bored of the same thing, seeks lady for possible romance. Kent. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 386234

CHRIS 68, 5ft 9ins, 13st, frustrated widower, likes country/western music, real ale, gardening, cruises, looking for companionship. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 402271

BLACK male, looking for 1-2-1 relationship with a kind back, understanding female. Tel No: 0906 515 7112 Box No: 406221

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Business

Eurostar is on the right track as revenues soar

By Chris Britcher

chris.britcher@archant.co.uk

EUROSTAR says it is full speed ahead after its figures for the first quarter of the year showed strong growth in both passenger numbers and revenues.

The findings were contained in the firm's financial figures released this morning.

Eurostar operates high-speed rail services from St Pancras in London via terminals in Ebbsfleet and Ashford to the Continent.

It confirmed a 3 per cent growth in passenger numbers to 2.3 million (2.2m in the same quarter 2013) and sales revenues leaping 7 per cent, year-on-year, to £227m (£213m in Q1 2013).

And its bosses say the economic outlook is looking bright.

It says that during the first three months of the year Eurostar has seen signs that growing economic confidence has translated into stronger business travel bookings on both sides of the Channel.

Nicolas Petrovic, chief executive, said: "The improvement we have seen



BOOST: Strong quarter for service

in the corporate travel market in recent months underpins the strong performance reported today.

"Coupled with the benign winter weather, which saw far lower levels of weather-related disruption than in previous years, the first quarter has set us on course for continued growth throughout the year."

The year-on-year growth has been

delivered despite the fact that the 2014 Easter holidays fall outside the first quarter of the year.

Traditionally a period with high volumes of leisure travel bookings, the absence of Easter ticket sales contribution from the first quarter figures highlights, Eurostar says, the underlying resilience of the leisure travel market.

Demand for services among leisure travellers continues to grow across all Eurostar's core markets and the spring booking horizon is "encouraging", it says.

The publication of the results coincides with the opening of the first phases of Eurostar's new ticket office in St Pancras International.

The work represents a significant financial investment, itself part of a wider programme of works to upgrade passenger facilities within Eurostar's stations.

This programme includes work currently under way at Lille Europe station to significantly increase the capacity of the Eurostar terminal in order to accommodate anticipated growth in the volume of connecting passengers.

Promotion site to swell town

A WEBSITE promoting Ashford's town centre and one of the first fruits of the town's selection by retail guru Mary Portas to receive additional funding and expertise is set to go live.

LoveAshford.com will showcase the town centre and promote local businesses, which can now register for free.

It has been created by the Ashford Town Team and Ashford Borough Council as part of the Portas Pilot bid.

Howzat? Club's digital delivery

KENT County Cricket Club has signed a sponsorship deal with electrical retailer Barretts Digital World.

The partnership, initially for a one-year term, will see the Canterbury retailer work with the County Championship club on a host of cross-promotional opportunities.

They include the launch of an affinity programme that will see supporters offered special deals.

Investment targets hit as agency eyes successful 2014

INVESTMENT promotion agency Locate in Kent has narrowly hit its targets to create or retain jobs in the county last year, figures released this week revealed.

Set a target of 2,750 jobs either directly created, retained or indirectly created, for the year to the end of March 2014, the agency recorded 2,762.

Of those, 1,398 were new jobs, with 917 being jobs retained.

They come from 56 firms committing to relocating to the county or agreeing expansion plans.

Some 820 jobs were as a result of what is known as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) – overseas companies setting up operations or expanding in the county. It is a sector particularly sought after as it can deliver big economic windfalls.

The agency has looked to increase the number of such projects and has set up relationships with agencies in France, Germany and the US in a bid to attract investment to the county.

Key industries include ICT and life sciences.

Paul Wookey, Locate in Kent's chief executive, said: "This year's figures are encouraging and reflect the increased confidence and growth in the UK economy."

"Our latest figures show that 2013/14 was a strong year, and with 306 active projects in the pipeline, which the team here is working hard to convert into successes, we're confident of this year being equally successful."

Mark Dance, cabinet member for economic development at Kent County Council, said: "The figures for FDI give us particular encouragement as investments from foreign companies tends to be greater in both capital and jobs terms than that of domestic businesses, and companies that move here from abroad often reinvest later."

"It is vital that we tap into the FDI market."

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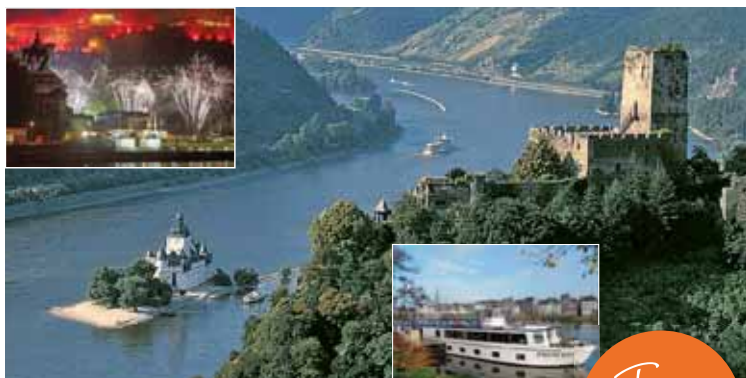
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QUOTE:
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The Inverness to the Kyle of Lochalsh line - as featured in Michael Palin's original Great Railway Journeys TV series - has spectacular views, passing Loch Carron, the Cullin Hills and the Isle of Skye - enjoy a return trip on the train and a visit to Skye. We also include a ride on the Strathspey Steam Railway; a visit to Loch Ness, with the option of a loch cruise; and a Highlands coach tour with a whisky distillery visit.

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By Steve Loader
editorial@kosmedia.co.uk

Preview

Jeep Cherokee

Price: £25,500
Driving appeal: **Not driven yet**
Image: ★★★★★
Space: ★★★★★
Value: ★★★★★
Running costs: ★★★
How green?: ★★★
Best rival: **Range Rover Evoque**

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NEW HEIGHTS? Jeep hopes that the new Cherokee will emulate the success of its predecessors of the 1990s (below right) and the 2000s (below left)

Jeep and Fiat's new 4x4

British buyers really liked the original Jeep Cherokee for its value-for-money off-road ability... can the latest version retake those heights, asks **Steve Loader**

It is seemingly a match made in motoring heaven: 4x4 king meets small-car star.

What we all wait to see in May is whether the new Jeep Cherokee – offspring of parent brand Chrysler's union with Fiat – gets the best genes from each parent, or the worst.

The smart money is on a winner rather than a loser, though. Jeep has never been a slacker in the 4x4 stakes; the original Jeep gained fame as the g-anywhere battlefield wagon and, while the rough and ready Wrangler model is its spiritual successor, the Cherokee has always been seen as its civilised cousin – barely less able off-road and something you can drive anywhere while still enjoying the sound system.

Unfortunately for UK buyers, the Cherokee's economy has never been a strong suit, but Fiat's takeover of the Chrysler-Jeep empire means the Italian marque can bring something to the party here: expertise that has repeatedly created the best cut-price compact off-road vehicle in the business – the Fiat Panda 4x4.

So, no surprise then that the all-new Jeep Cherokee's powertrains include two powerful yet miserly Fiat 2.0-litre Multijet turbodiesels (140 and 170bhp) plus a new nine-speed auto transmission (170bhp model only) that should cope with just about every motoring scenario.

Taking its cue from 4x4 arch-rival Land Rover, the new Cherokee will also be available in either eco-friendly front-wheel-drive or full 4x4 configuration, but there's also a



clever feature of the latter: Jeep says the newcomer will be the first mid-size SUV to feature rear-axle disconnect, meaning reduced energy loss when 4x4 capability isn't needed and boosting fuel efficiency. The rear-axle disconnect seamlessly switches between two- and four-wheel-drive without any driver input.

But while there is some interesting tech in the powertrains, much debate will centre on the car's styling and cabin quality.

On the looks front, the new Cherokee is probably the sleekest since the Classic model that launched the nameplate here back in the 1990s. Thankfully, that also moves it even further away from the funky-chunky Cherokee of the early Noughties.

It's an improvement, too, on the boxy looks of its immediate predecessor, although the jury may still be out on the car's updated interpretation of the famous Jeep slotted grille. This one has the slots all right, but they have a crease running across them at right-angles – a feature used on some past Jeep models but never quite as



exaggerated as this.

Turning to the cabin, Jeep has often struggled to trim and equip the interiors of its lesser models to match the cars' off-road prowess but this time promises 'premium interior craftsmanship' drawing on luxurious standards set by the latest incarnation of its big brother, the Grand Cherokee.

There are some upmarket options, too, like the CommandView dual-pane electric sunroof, extending from the windscreen and almost to the rear of the car.

Buyers can also have a heated, leather-wrapped steering wheel and wireless-charging pad for phones and other personal devices.

The Cherokee interior is practical, too, with 60/40 split rear seats adjusting fore and aft for increased passenger comfort and cargo flexibility, while the front passenger seat folds flat and offers in-seat storage beneath the seat cushion.

The new Cherokee has also had a big thumbs-up on safety, with a five-star 'best in class' Euro NCAP rating in the Small Off-road 4x4 category.

Other view...

the Petrolhead

One thing you can rely on with a Jeep: if it has full 4x4, then it will be as good as the ground clearance allows off-road

She says

I like the profile, economy and practicality of the new Cherokee, but I think that front end might take some getting used to

the Eco-warrior

At last an American brand wakes up and smells the coffee on economy – pity it didn't get a dash of Fiat espresso a bit earlier

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Lexus aiming high

LEXUS has unveiled a sharp-suited compact premium crossover, due here later in 2014.

Toyota's luxury arm says the NX aims to targets customers new to the brand with its edgy styling and high-end technologies, including a petrol-electric hybrid and – a first for Lexus – turbocharged petrol unit.

The unspoken blurb is how Lexus hopes the NX will tackle rivals such as the all-conquering Range Rover Evoque and Audi's classy Q-series models.



UK vans living on

YOU could be forgiven if you thought UK panel-van production vanished when Ford switched Transit production to Turkey last year, but it is very much alive at Luton.

This is where a British success story has been written since 2001 by the Vauxhall Vivaro – also produced there as the Renault Trafic and Nissan Primastar.

A second-generation Vivaro family begins to roll off the Luton production line in August.



MX-5 reaches 25

ICON is a word used too liberally by the motor industry, but it is totally appropriate to the Mazda MX-5 – a fun car inspired by classic British sports cars of the 50s and 60s.

The little Japanese roadster – launched in 1989 and soon to enter its fourth incarnation – is celebrating its 25th anniversary and drawing close to the million-sales landmark globally, making it easily the best-selling two-seater ever.

SUPERB: Skoda's family car now boasts an exterior to match its interior quality. Whether saloon or estate, the Superb offers lots of affordable inside space

Blast from glorious past is quite simply superb

Skoda still draws old jokes but its top car justifies a valued name from the brand heritage, says **Steve Loader**

Skoda Superb 2.0TDi 140PS Elegance

Price:	£25,990
Driving appeal:	★★★
Image:	★★★★
Space:	★★★★★
Value:	★★★★★
Running costs:	★★★★
Reliability:	★★★★★
How green?:	★★★★
Road tax:	£30/yr
Best rival:	Vauxhall Insignia

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THERE will be some badge snobs who think a Skoda called the Superb is the biggest Skoda joke of all.

But the rejuvenated Czech brand will, as usual, have the last laugh because the Superb name was well earned long ago.

Coined in 1933, the car was so good that, within three years, it catapulted Skoda from No 3 to the top of the car market in what was then Czechoslovakia, a country already noted for its engineering prowess and soon 'acquired' by Adolf Hitler's Germany.

Several variants followed, including military ones used by the conquering Nazis – Field Marshal Rommel frequently chose a Skoda as his staff car.

But the name was soon shelved during the dark days of the Soviet era, which spawned all those old jokes about Skoda quality, and not revived until 2001, when the modern era under Volkswagen was well under way.

The current car (from £18,555) is the second modern generation, launched in 2008 and given a major revamp last year that upgraded engine options and gave it the new corporate front and back ends.

Up to that point, the Superb's frumpy

looks were its biggest let-down and a turn-off before a test drive.

Now, with its smart new grille, the Superb is worth that second look and what you get is superb value for money: it's smooth, refined and well-equipped, with the interior space of a director-level executive car, yet it costs less than some family models.

It also has many thoughtful touches, the best being the double-function rear opening – a bootlid most of the time but one that can also be opened as a hatch for bigger loads into the car's capacious class-leading 595-litre boot – the Ford Mondeo is its closest rival here with 528.

Fold the seats down and you also have load space to make an estate green with envy – 1,700 litres versus the Mondeo's 1,448 litres, though there is also a big-selling, good-looking Superb Estate variant (from £19,680) offering a 633-litre boot/1,865-litre load space.

Superb engine options start, amazingly, with the VW group's versatile 1.4-litre turbocharged petrol unit, which has been such a revelation in most cases and delivers 125bhp here to give this big car

surprising zip. Its modest upfront price could tempt many who do not need to cover big mileages.

There are also two 105bhp 1.6-litre diesel versions, including the miserly Greenline II (£20,070) eco model capable of 67.3mpg on the official combined cycle.

But the best all-rounder has to be the 2.0-litre diesel tested here, which has plenty of power – 140PS (138bhp) for 0-62mph in 10 seconds – to push the Superb along while also offering low CO₂ emissions of 119g/km and a combined 61.4mpg.

Sold in up-spec Elegance form, it also comes laden with goodies and quality, including smart 18-inch alloys, premium infotainment system, powered and heated front seats, heated and folding door-mirrors and leather seats.

As hinted earlier, the cabin is huge, with limo-like head and legroom and the ambience of a snob-badge premium model, but just keep remembering the Superb's actual price.

The dashboard is fairly conservative, but none the worse for that, and arranged in a typically logical Skoda fashion.

Ah, but can it deliver the upmarket driving experience?

Yes, with one caveat: this is a quiet, refined and versatile car with a premium spec at an affordable price, but some buyers might trade some of its ride comfort for a rival with more composure on a winding road, where the Superb tends to heel a little even if it grips well. It's a small complaint, though.





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Official fuel consumption in mpg (litres/100km) for the Superb range: Urban 21.7 (13.0) to 54.3 (5.2), Extra Urban 40.4 (7.0) to 78.3 (3.6), Combined 30.4 (9.3) to 67.3 (4.2). CO₂ emissions for the Superb range are 217 to 109g/km. Standard EU test figures for comparative purposes and may not reflect real driving results.

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To discuss this opportunity, or to arrange an informal visit, please contact:

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Liz Justice, on 01233 616202

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For further details and a job description, please contact Mrs Linda Taylor, Abbey Court School, Rede Court Road, Strood, Kent, ME2 3SP (01634 338236), stating the position for which you are applying.

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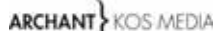


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LEGAL AND PUBLIC NOTICES

In accordance with Part 5, section 17 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations 2011 this notice advises that a planning application accompanied by an Environmental Statement (ES) has been made by Brett Aggregates Limited to Swale Borough Council, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT.

The proposed development at Oare Mineral Workings, Ham Road, Faversham, ME13 7TS comprises a hybrid application described as:

Outline component:

Residential development for 375 dwellings with all matters reserved other than the means of access and realignment of the Oare Road and Ham Road Junction on land at Oare Mineral Works (north of Oare Road and west and south of Ham Road), Faversham, Kent.

Detailed component:

Change of use from storage and vacant uses of the former Gunpowder Works listed buildings to provide 873 square metres of offices, workshop-studios, storage, and 714 square metres of community uses (with retention of the two existing dwellings) including minor internal alterations to form toilet and washroom facilities and the formation of associated parking areas, earth bund engineering works, country park, landscaping, demolition of plant and buildings, illustrative details of landscaped parking area on land at Oare Mineral Works (north of Oare Road and west and south of Ham Road), Faversham, Kent.

The Council has allocated reference SW/14/0257 to the planning application. A copy of all documentation is available to be viewed at Swale Borough Council's Offices (address above) during reasonable office hours. The documentation will be available to be viewed until at least 18th May 2014 as 21 days from the date this notice was placed/published.

Paper copies are available for purchase at £200 for the ES plus £100 for the accompanying appendices and drawings to the ES. A copy of the Non Technical Summary is available for £20. Please contact SLR Consulting Ltd, 83 Victoria Street, London, SW1H 0HW for copies of the aforementioned documents.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Changes to Broomhill Bank School, Rusthall, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN3 0TB

Kent County Council is proposing to increase the designated number of places offered at Broomhill Bank School, Broomhill Road, Rusthall, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN3 0TB from 80 to 136 places with effect from September 2014. It is proposed that this would be accommodated through improvements, expansion and development of the current site.

Whilst the proposal is to increase the designation number for September 2014, the number of pupils on roll will be increased incrementally between September 2014 and September 2017.

Notice is given in accordance with section 19 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 that Kent County Council intends to make the following prescribed alterations to Broomhill Bank School, Rusthall, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN3 0TB to expand the school from 80 places to 136 places from 1 September 2014.

This Notice is an extract from the complete proposal.

Copies of the complete proposal can be obtained from Jared Nehra, Area Education Officer (West Kent), Kent County Council, Worrall House, 30 Kings Hill Avenue, West Malling ME19 4AE. The complete proposal is also available on the website at www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools/school-consultations

Within four weeks from the date of publication, any person may send in a response supporting, objecting or commenting on the proposals to Jared Nehra, Area Education Officer (West Kent) at the above address or email school.consultations@kent.gov.uk. The closing date for objections and comments is 26 May 2014.

Signed:

PATRICK LEESON
Corporate Director
Education, Learning and Skills
Kent County Council

Dated: 26 April 2014



To advertise in this section
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1. The site of the application is within/affecting a designated Conservation Area (Section 73) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.
2. The proposed development may affect the Listed Building or it's setting.
3. The application is for a Major Development.

SW/14/0333 & SW/14/0473:
(1) Erection of a cabin style garden shed in the garden towards the rear boundary. (2) Repositioning of a satellite dish – 5 Walnut Tree Cottages, South Street, BOUGHTON: **REASONS 1 & 2**

SW/14/0416 & SW/14/0417:
Change of use from school to dwelling, addition of partition to annexe school house from main school buildings & general modernisation and replacement of external joinery – The School House, Dunkirk School, London Road, DUNKIRK; **REASON 2**

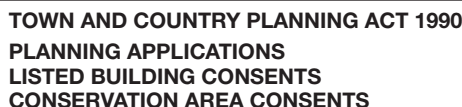
SW/14/0420:
Replacement front door – 18 Nelson Street, FAVERSHAM;
REASON 1

SW/14/0439:
Replacement of temporary teaching accommodation with permanent facilities – Selling C of E Primary School, The Street,
SELLING: REASON 1

SW/14/0447:
Conversion of the office annexe to flats A & B – 4 Preston Street,
FAVERSHAM; **REASONS 1 & 2**

Particulars of the proposal(s) can be obtained from Planning Services, Swale Borough Council, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, where copies of the applications and all documents submitted with them may be inspected during office hours; any representations should be made in writing to this address.

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American football is fast, furious and female-friendly as skills camp shows

The county's best players – both male and female – spent two exhausting but rewarding days learning from some of the US game's stars. **Ashley Newman** finds out more...

FOOTBALL ready! We hear this shouted time and again on a cold Sunday morning at the AFD Pro-Am Kick-off Camp run by American Football Development Limited, whose representatives ventured across the pond to Kent – and Aylesham Welfare Leisure Centre in particular – this month in a bid to take this growing sport to the next level in the UK.

The line-up of men and women who attended the camp were taken through a weekend of gruelling drills, skills and speed tests by an army of coaches including two-time Super Bowl champion Byron Chamberlain of the Denver Broncos and other former NFL stars Derrick McBride, Orrin Thompson and Ronnie Ghent.

As music blared out from the DJ tent across the field, both rookie and veteran players from teams across the country, as well as Kent's very own East Kent Mavericks, Canterbury Chargers and the newly-formed Canterbury Women, were huddled together to chant and clap their way between drills. The Americans certainly know how to do motivation.

The growth of the game in the UK

has been gaining momentum over the last few years, particularly with several NFL games being hosted in the capital, as well as talks of a London franchise.

American football participation has a particularly strong foothold in Canterbury, with almost 200 players across the city.

Former Dallas Cowboys linebacker and AFD coach Derrick McBride said: "I didn't know how players from the UK would embrace the coaching from the US, but they took advantage [at the camp] and it was exciting to see."

Pro Bowl tight-end Chamberlain agreed: "Football in the US is a cultural thing – it's ingrained in our everyday life and our society. It's not a cultural thing here in the UK like your football or soccer is, but I was pleasantly surprised by the aptitude and the passion."

"The number of people that were here early before the camp even started – that's what we would look for when we're scouting for players."

After craving respite following hours of relentless sprinting and drilling, there was no let-up as we were desperate to avoid doing 'up-downs', a drill involving running on the spot and press-ups on the whistle dished



FOOTBALL READY! It was exactly the same tough training and demanding penalties for everyone at the Pro-Am Kick-off Camp held earlier this month at Aylesham Welfare Leisure Centre

out to those who failed to adhere to discipline or technique, much like you would expect to be issued by an army drill sergeant.

And there was no let-up for the women, either, as what was most striking about this camp was the level of equality shown towards the female players.

"It was really amazing to be invited along to a football camp that didn't separate the fact that there were men and women there," said Canterbury Women player Laura Croucher.

"You did exactly the same things. You weren't told 'Women can run a shorter distance or don't have to do 20 press-ups – they can do 10'. There was none of that. We all did exactly the same thing and we were expected to do the same thing, and that was good because we can do it."

While the women's game is only beginning to take off in the UK, games will be limited to five-a-side instead of the traditional 11-a-side format. Canterbury Women's coach Joe Oliver said: "Ideally, we'd like to progress to eight-a-side tournaments."

"I like how it's progressing as it's obviously moving away from that viewpoint that American football is a man's sport. It's obviously an equality sport."

He also pointed out one of the differentiating factors with female players, which could put them at an advantage over the men: "I think there are less egos with the women than the men, so when you ask the women to repeat fundamentals again and again they are not there questioning why they are doing it, as they're realising that they are getting better at football, whereas certain male players will question why they're doing it."

“ It was really amazing to be invited to a football camp that didn't separate the men and women there. You did exactly the same things. ”

Laura Croucher
Canterbury Women's team

However, while the growth of the game does appear to be promising, there are concerns that it may struggle to grow in popularity as some men's teams have.

East Kent Mavericks coach Glenn Lindley, who has been involved with the team since it started nine years ago and seen the men's premiership side rise to one of the top five in the country, said that despite potential growth in the women's game it may struggle to prosper.

"I don't think they should set up an 11-a-side women's team. I don't think there are the facilities, the infrastruc-

ture or the coaches available to do it, or the level of interest. It's the same as youth football.

"There are a lot of people trying to force youth football to be 11-a-side, but many struggle to fill the teams. My opinion is that youth and women's football should be eight-a-side. In Ireland they ran men's [American] football at eight-a-side to get it established and now they play 11-a-side, but they still struggle to fill 11-a-side teams."

This has also been true of the women's game in the States in that it has struggled to establish itself. Despite this, the fact that the game is equality-driven is perhaps its most empowering trait: American football has no rules to say that women can't compete in the men's leagues.

So, unlike in English football, where male and female players are separated at the age of 13, American football teams in the UK have been inclusive of women throughout their adult teams.

This includes the Mavericks, who had a female player compete in the team several years ago. "For a woman to come and join [the men's team] she would have to be a high-level athlete already," said Lindley.

"A first-team women's rugby player could probably just about get a slot on the men's American football team with the Mavericks – a national-level player would easily get on the team. We had a woman play with us a few years ago and she'd played for Kent women's under-21s [in rugby] and she competed with us."

So, surprising as that may be to those who consider the sport the reserve of considerably-sized men, whether the women's game prospers or not, it seems there will always be a place for women in American football. Women: time to get football ready!

■ For more information or to turn up and play, email Ruth Holliday at r.m.holliday13@canterbury.ac.uk or find Canterbury Women's American Football on Facebook.

Week ending April 27, 2014 **71**



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ŠKODA Octavia

12/12 1.6 TDI CR Elegance 5dr Estate Petrol Blue Metallic under 10,000 miles	£14,695
11/11 1.6 TDI 105 Elegance 5dr Storm Blue under 13,000 miles	£12,795
11/11 2.0 TDI 140 Elegance 5dr Hatchback Brilliant Silver under 34,000 miles	£11,995
12/12 1.6 TDI 105 SE Plus 5dr Petrol Blue Metallic under 35,000 miles	£11,650
10/10 1.6 TDI CR Elegance 5dr Hatchback Arctic Green under 16,000 miles	£11,395
10/10 1.4 TSI 122 Elegance 5dr Aqua Blue under 12,000 miles	£10,595
10/60 1.2 TSI 105 S 5dr DSG Auto Storm Blue under 9,000 miles	£9,850

ŠKODA Superb

13/63 2.0 TDI 170 Outdoor Estate 4x4 5dr Black Magic under 4,000 miles	£23,650
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DSG/Automatics

13/13 Fabia 1.4 TSI vRS 180 5dr DSG Candy White under 5,000 miles	£13,495
12/12 Fabia 1.2 TSI 105 Elegance 5dr Estate DSG Auto Candy White 14,000 miles	£10,995
11/61 Fabia 1.4 TSI vRS 180 5dr Estate DSG Spirit Yellow under 14,000 miles	£9,995
11/60 Fabia 1.2 TSI 105 Elegance 5dr DSG Black Magic Pearl under 17,000 miles	£9,895
10/60 Octavia 1.2 TSI 105 S 5dr DSG Auto Storm Blue under 9,000 miles	£9,850
11/60 Fabia 1.4 TSI vRS 180 5dr DSG Race Blue under 40,000 miles	£9,750

Demonstrators

13/63 Superb 2.0 TDI 170 Outdoor Estate 4x4 5dr Black Magic under 4,000 miles	£23,650
13/13 Octavia 1.6 TDI 105 Elegance 5dr Estate Cappuccino under 10,000 miles	£15,495
13/63 Spaceback 1.2 TSI 105 SE 5dr Candy White under 3,000 miles	£14,995
13/63 Rapid 1.6 TDI 105 SE 5dr Red Rosso Brunello under 3,000 miles	£14,650
13/63 Spaceback 1.2 TSI 105 SE 5dr Candy White under 1,000 miles	£13,995
13/13 Fabia 1.4 TSI vRS 180 5dr, DSG Candy White under 9,000 miles	£13,495
13/63 Fabia 1.6 TDI 90 SE Estate 5dr Brilliant Silver under 3,000 miles	£12,995
13/63 Citigo 1.0 MPI 60 Sport 5dr Deep Black under 3,000 miles	£9,650
13/63 Citigo 1.0 MPI 60 S 5dr Candy White under 5,000 miles	£7,650
13/63 Citigo 1.0 MPI 60 S 5dr Candy White under 3,000 miles	£7,395

Other makes

12/62 Audi A3 2.0 TDI 140 S-Line 3dr Silver under 15,000 miles	£17,995
11/61 Suzuki Alto 1.0 S22 5dr Silver under 21,000 miles	£4,995
06/06 Vauxhall Meriva 1.4 16V Active 5dr Star Silver under 44,000 miles	£3,895

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